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The City of Six

by

Chauncey L. Canfield

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ISBN 978-1-331-71295-4
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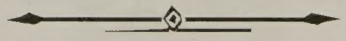

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THE CITY OF SIX

BY

CHAUNCEY L. CANFIELD

Author of "The Diary of a Forty-niner," etc.

With Five Illustrations by

JOHN W. NORTON

CHICAGO

A. C. McCLURG & CO.

1910

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1910

Published March 19, 1910

Entered at Stationers' Hall, London, England

The Lakeside Press
R. R. DONNELLEY & SONS COMPANY
CHICAGO

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

THE author of "The City of Six" passed away in San Francisco, November 20, 1909, a few days before the first proofs of his story reached him. Mr. Canfield was born in Litchfield, Conn., January 7, 1843. While yet a school boy he went to California to join his father, who was one of the early Argonauts, and with him worked claims and mines in Mariposa County. In the early '80's he was engaged in the newspaper business in Nevada. In the summer of 1884 he came to Chicago and secured a position with "The Chicago Times," on which journal he performed the duties of railroad editor and art critic. In 1891 he went to San Francisco and was appointed general agent for the Pacific coast for one of the largest railway systems in the West, and this position he held at the time of his death. His boyhood association with the hills and valleys of California, together with his literary instincts, peculiarly fitted him for writing on pioneer and mining life, and a great many short stories have come from his pen, besides the well-known book, "The Diary of a Forty-niner." "The City of Six" is his most ambitious story, and one that he had been working on for several years.

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"What Rance said has been said over and over since the creation." . . . . . *Frontispiece*

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THE CITY OF SIX

CHAPTER I

"THE CITY OF SIX"

NOW, there was a name to conjure with. It seemed to imply a story, or at least that its sponsors in departing from the commonplace were distinctive in their ideas. To be sure, the region round about teemed with odd and unique nomenclature. Hepsidam was just across the ridge, bordering on Hell's Half Acre, with Whiskey Diggings in close proximity. Jericho Flat lay between Jerusalem and Gomorrah, with Mount Zion looming up in the background, while Brandy City and Port Wine were flourishing camps in the immediate neighborhood. Fancy ran riot in the early fifties, with a tendency toward the vulgar and profane; but "The City of Six" was distinctive. Perhaps when one learned that Hog Ravine was on the other side of the slope, and that the city was built on a high pla-

teau at the head of Slug Canyon, there appeared in this name a certain incongruity, a refinement not altogether in harmony with the practical ideas of its neighbors. Over at Hepsidam the dwellers referred to it as "the camp of half a dozen jackasses," which they quickly abbreviated to "Jackassville"; and it must be confessed that the place was better known by that name than by the one given it by its founders.

The beauty of its site could not be vulgarized even by the irreverent. A bench of a dozen acres of level ground overhung the head of the canyon, on the edge of which one could stand and cast a stone into Downieville on the river bank two thousand feet below. And straight across on the other side the curling smoke from the cabin chimneys of the town of Monte Cristo was visible. The formidable Sierra Buttes crowned with eternal snow—the culminating heights of the range—loomed up grandly to the view. The ridge in the background climbed to an added altitude of seven hundred feet, clothed with giant pines, impressive in the majesty of their growth and telling of the ages that had passed during which the solitude had been unvexed by the presence of man. But that was of the past. The lure of gold had

brought an invasion, and in the deep gorges, in the profound canyons, and on the hills and mountain-sides, an army of toiling humanity, like busy ants and as insignificant, was unceasingly active in scarring nature with work and waste.

To this spot a half-dozen pioneers had found their way. They had drifted together down on the North Fork and had mined and prospected up the stream, pausing to test a bar, a ravine, or a promising gulch, until in 1852 they had scaled the steep trail to the head of Slug Canyon, where "ounce diggings" had served to stay their wanderings and settle them permanently. In those nomadic days shallow placers were soon worked out, and gulches and ravines quickly exhausted. The deep diggings of the buried channels came later and served to build up permanent and flourishing mining-towns, which took the place of the former clusters of log cabins, the rude and temporary habitations of the early pioneers.

These half-dozen gold seekers had found fair reward for their labor on the head of the euphonious Slug Canyon, and had also discovered that where it lost itself in the plateau the rich streak kept on, and that the gravel followed the now level bedrock into the mountain. This was a new

problem and one not easily solved, although it was not long until it was demonstrated that ancient rivers, blotted out for ages, had coursed through old channels hundreds of feet above the bed of the present flowing streams, and that the yellow gold was sifted through them in quantities that yielded fabulous returns to their exploiters.

It was one of those old river-beds that they had stumbled on, that had enriched the canyon with a portion of its wealth where it had been eroded out by the North Fork; and the canyon was now a treasure-house at whose door they were knocking. Virgin gold, coarse gold in profusion in the gravel, and theirs for the gathering! The chill winds of autumn betokened the approach of a Sierra winter, a season which at their altitude of four thousand feet meant a blanket of snow over mountain and hollow, an icy breath freezing the tumbling waters of the canyon, and hurtling storms that would drive every living thing to the shelter of earth burrow or a migration to the more temperate lower foothills. There was grave consultation among the Six. Should they temporarily abandon their find and seek the comfort of winter quarters that Downieville offered? There were many tempting distractions in that

town: hotels where square meals were procurable, fandango houses in which Mexican girls for the price of a drink invited brief companionship in the dance, gorgeous gambling-houses within whose hospitable doors one could flirt with fickle Fortune, and a church with a high-priced preacher and a sparse congregation. Rance Poole voted for Downieville and its allurements. Rance was the youngest member of the aggregation, a Mississippian, who for love of adventure had left his old plantation home at the inception of the gold fever, and bringing with him two likely young darkies from whose labor he reckoned on gathering a golden harvest, had reached the goal just before California entered the Union as a free State. Naturally the bondsmen repudiated the bond, and Rance was confronted with the dire necessity of providing his own living. It was either gamble or work, and his predilection was for the first named; but the Goddess of Chance was shy and fickle, the association of rough professionals and rude desperadoes not exactly to his taste. After a brief career as a sport he turned to mining, in which pursuit he had had fair success. In brawn and sinew he was not the equal of his companions. He could not lift as

heavy a boulder, nor was the stroke of his pick or the steady rock of the cradle as effectual; yet he stuck to it with quiet energy and, as Mike Donovan, the rollicking Irishman of the party, put it, "did his best, and who the divil could do more?" After a time he assumed the functions of cook, and here he really excelled,—that is, after a brief apprenticeship, during which he learned not to salt his beans before they were well boiled, or to make too liberal a use of saleratus in the dough. His skill with the rifle kept the camp supplied with fresh venison, varied with an occasional bear rib, while squirrel stews were quite common in the camp menu. There were times when the absurd inappropriateness of his occupation disturbed Rance's meditations. Busied with his pots and pans or carefully regulating the heat of the oak coals around the Dutch oven, his costume a woollen shirt and duck overalls, he could not help contrasting the crudities of the present with the refinements of his former existence, when clothed in immaculate linen he lolled on the broad veranda of the plantation home, servants at his beck and call, eager to save the young master from every exertion. In these self-communings he often asked himself why he

had given up the life of luxurious ease to become one of the "mudsills" whom he had been reared to despise. Surely the "governor" would have considered his part in the camp duties an impossible degradation, and a horrified mother and sisters would have been utterly incredulous that he could stoop to such menial labor. Not only provided with a liberal education, he had had instilled into every fibre of his being the belief in the superiority of the men of the chivalrous South, and had been reared in the expectation of either taking his place at the bar, adopting a political career, or entering into a matrimonial alliance that would link him to some other prominent family and annex broad acres and human chattels as a compensation for the relinquishment of his careless young bachelorhood. But it came about that legal studies failed to interest him; there were not enough offices to go around among eager aspirants of the same ilk; and eligible heiresses did not grow on every bush. Although the fertile paternal lands under the supervision of a driving overseer brought in a handsome revenue, it did not suffice for the extravagances of the possessors. The cotton bales were mortgaged before they reached the market, the increase in slaves found

its way to other plantations, and as time rolled on the incumbrances on the old acres grew rather than diminished.

To the youngest scion of a prolific house, with sisters to be portioned and elder brothers to be provided for, it was not an alluring prospect; and this rather pessimistic view had been the chief incentive to a leap in the dark. There came the rumors of a new El Dorado, where the rivers rolled over Pactolian sands and riches were to be had for the gathering. The spirit of adventure woke in his plastic mind, and taking his two body servants, who protested their fidelity and devotion to Marse Rance, he made the weary journey and encountered a rude awakening at its finish; for the novelty of freedom sponged away the loyalty born of servitude, and Rance was thrown on his own resources.

This review of past and present conditions, however, did not depress him; his spirits were too buoyant, he was too healthy a young animal to allow care to sit heavily on his shoulders, and there were compensations. His share in the results of the mining operations was fairly good; the summer had brought him a couple of thousand dollars, his companions were congenial and

considerate, his task as cook and purveyor was not humiliating. In the thousands who toiled among the surrounding hills and gorges there were many his superiors in intellectual attainments and his peers in gentle breeding; and in the intervals between the meals, when the pot could be left unwatched, he tramped the mountains roundabout, ostensibly hunting fresh meat, but insensibly a young pagan rejoicing in vigorous manhood and conscious health. The Red Gods called him among the pines and on the steep mountain-sides, and he followed their invitation until the lengthening shadows warned him that a hungry crew would soon appear over the edge of the plateau, clamoring for the evening meal. Then he came back to earth again and gave his mind to the preparation of some savory dish, an unexpected dozen of mountain quail wrapped in bay leaves and a slice of bacon and roasted over the glowing coals; a succulent camp stew where gray squirrel, salt pork, and potatoes appeased glorious appetites; or venison steaks fresh cut from the carcass of a doe, hanging on the branch of an oak tree close by, making bull beef a despised article.

Fortunately Rance was spared the indignity

of dish-washing. It was a rule that each individual took care of his own particular tin cup and plate, and in order that no confusion should arise, on each dish was scratched the initial of its owner. At least once a week they were scoured with wood ashes to bring the distinguishing marks out of greasy obscurity.

In that bracing mountain air and daily exercise of muscle-hardening toil, "digestion waited on appetite," and Rance's culinary skill received the heartiest approbation of his partners. During a week's holiday trip to Marysville, Mike Donovan had been installed as a substitute, but the resultant concoctions were so atrocious and unpalatable, that Rance's return was signalized by an enthusiastic ovation and the Irishman relegated to the canyon and the rocker. "Sure, they have all been living too high while ye were gone, and what they want is common grub. What I've been giving them was uncommon," was Mike's comment on the eagerness betrayed by his companions for his abdication.

CHAPTER II

RICH DEPOSITS OF GOLD

THE shallow gravel deposits in the bed of the canyon had been worked out, and in following the rich streak into the mountain they were confronted with what was to them a new phase of mining. The bank rose up abruptly to the top of the bench, a height of one hundred feet or more, while the bedrock continued on into the hill almost at a level. It was evident that there was but one method by which it could be mined, that of drifting or tunnelling along the course. This meant a change from the simple methods of rocking and panning which had heretofore served. Doubtless their ingenuity would have been equal to meeting the new conditions had they been called on to exercise it, but fortunately they were not the first to encounter these old channels. Across the ridge the pioneers had stumbled on these "upper leads," as they termed them, and at Forest City, on the banks of Kanaka Creek, at Chipp's Flat, and at Minnesota, the Summer of '52 had signalized the develop-

ment of the ancient river-bed, and a busy multitude of toilers was exploiting the deep diggings for miles along the old channel from the North to and across the Middle Fork of the *Rio Las Uvas* — corrupted into the "Yuba River."

Given an aggregation of men in any common pursuit, some one in particular, either by assertion, fitness, or ability, assumes the leadership; one who, after the pros and cons of any question are discussed, gives the final and deciding word. Our little company of half a dozen had not been exempt from this tendency, and had tacitly recognized one of their number as fit to direct. The choice was not unwise, and the results had justified the selection. He was the dean of his comrades by virtue of years, and their superior in a certain practical knowledge and hard sense. He had a tactful way of guiding and managing their affairs that avoided the irritation of command and substituted the softer method of persuasion.

Wakefield, upon whom this duty fell, was a fine specimen of the typical American, a well nourished, farm-bred giant, over six feet in height, of big bone and hard muscle, trained by outdoor labor to the condition of an athlete, a

blue-eyed, fair-haired Saxon, temperate in habit and cleanly in thought. On the mental side he was neither brilliant nor intellectual, and there was none of the poet or philosopher in his make-up; or rather, any latent gifts in that direction were in a state of non-development. The daily clean-up interested him to a greater degree than any other phase of his life; and the incense of the bean-pot appealed to him more pungently than the balsamic breath of the pines. Born at, and arriving at manhood on, the border of a thriving village in the interior of New York State, he had married and settled down to the hard work of a small farm, until the breaking out of the gold fever and the marvellous tales of the riches of this almost unknown Golconda had stirred his sluggish pulse and incited him to adventure. Leaving his wife and a little girl of fourteen—his only child—established in comparative comfort (he had sold the farm and bought a small cottage within the village limits, where with a dependent aunt they were comfortably installed), he was one of the first to journey westward, arriving in '49 and at once seeking the mines.

In the lapsing three years he had drifted from one locality to another, as the twenty-four-foot

claims were worked out; panning, rocking, tomming, on bar and ravine, in gulch and canyon, always mining with substantial if not phenomenal success, and as a result seven thousand dollars was to his credit in the home bank, the surplus above the expenditures for his own and his family's support. Like all pioneers he was "going back" shortly to enjoy the fruits of his industry,—an intention strengthened and confirmed by the loving, pleading letters that came as regularly as "steamer day" rolled around. He certainly would have departed the present autumn had it not been that the unexpected development of the deep diggings gave him pause. Here was a promise of substantial wealth far beyond his ambitions. They had pierced the mountain only twenty feet, and the yield of Slug Canyon had faded into insignificance. The bottom layer of gravel was rich; along the bedrock and in its crevices and irregularities nuggets were embedded and scattered, coarse gold that turned the scale to the half-ounce, ounce, five ounces, and on the last day's work they had done, Mike's pick had unearthed a beauty as big as his fist—which was not a small one,—a white rock seamed with gold, which when broken up

yielded six hundred dollars. Then came a catastrophe, for the next morning they found the gravel, to whose solidity they had trusted, had given way and the ground caved to the end of the excavation. Blessing their stars that they had not been caught in its treacherous fall, they brought operations to a full stop, and consultation and projecting was in order. It was recalled that passing wayfarers had brought rumors and news of like discoveries over the ridge, and it was decided that Wakefield should make a journey of observation and see how the boys on Kanaka Creek met the problem.

It was only a few hours' tramp, and a couple of days' stay with the hospitable workers at Minnesota and Alleghany initiated him into the method and science of timbering, capping, lagging, and breasting as developed up to that time, and also demonstrated that the inclemency of a Sierra winter would not prevent work being prosecuted during that season provided necessary and adequate preparations were made. On his return the knowledge gained was duly imparted to his comrades and discussed in all its bearings, and a final conclusion was reached. To stay meant practically a six months' isolation

from the world, a close and enforced companionship, with no relaxation afforded by change of scene or distraction to relieve the solitude. They had toiled through the summer with fair results —a dividend of over two thousand dollars each having been declared,—and all of the party had anticipated a change. Besides those already mentioned, there were two brothers from Ohio, healthy, honest plodders with no particular qualities to distinguish them from the ordinary, except an unfailing good humor and a ready acquiescence in Wakefield's plans; and a Texan, who had fought in the war for Texan independence and campaigned with Doniphan on the border and through the Mexican War.

He was big, slow-witted, and unlettered, swore by Colonel Bowie, despised a "Greaser," and yet, having been the hero of, or actor in, many moving adventures by flood and field, he was able to beguile weary hours in recounting his participation in exploits, hairbreadth escapes, bloody encounters, and romantic escapades on both sides of the Rio Grande. Wakefield, as intimated, had resolved on a trip to his old home; and Rance Poole, wearied of his culinary duties, had decided on a visit to San Francisco and looked forward

to a resumption of broadcloth and fine linen with an anticipatory satisfaction that went far toward reconciling him to his labors among the pots and kettles.

However, even he was dazzled by the prospect of wealth that the new discovery promised, and agreed that after a two weeks' holiday at Marysville he would come back and resume his duties. Mike Donovan stipulated for a week off at Downieville, which meant a glorious spree,—"Sure, he had n't drank a drop for a six-month." Filling up his buckskin purse with gold dust to the top, he struck off down the trail to the town on the river, where many seductive whiskey mills stood with open doors to welcome him and his like. Rance also took his departure for the valley metropolis, and the four were left to prepare for the winter's campaign.

There was an abundance of preliminary work confronting them. First, the temporary shelters that had answered well enough during the summer were entirely inadequate, and substantial, warm structures were a necessity; secondly, a supply of poles and logs for timbering the drifts and bracing up the tunnels, and a big lot of firewood must be provided; thirdly, and not of least

importance, a six months' store of provisions must be laid in, including simple remedies for possible sickness or accidents, not forgetting a little whiskey (they had been singularly abstemious during their association), and plenty of tobacco. The weed was essential, and they were all its devotees. Labor was suspended many times during the working days for a brief puff from the old black pipes, the length of the siesta after the noon meal was measured by the consumption of the well-filled bowls, and after supper, stretched under the spreading oaks, the fragrant smoke acted as a sedative to tired bodies and soothed the unstrung nerves.

The October air had grown suddenly chill; the soft south wind that had tempered the summer's heat had a sharp, stimulating tang that conveyed a sense of impending change; in the morning a white frost blanched the yellow, brittle grass, and a flurry of snow whitened the landscape and left patches on the mountain-sides where the sun's rays failed to reach. The lengthening shadows of the shortening day, and the falling leaves that circled and sailed in the breeze and lodged and huddled in the hollows, were re-

minders of the wane of the year and impelled the four to strenuous and extra exertion.

It was planned to build double cabins, connecting with each other by roof and an enclosure some twenty feet in length, in which could be stored dry wood and a goodly supply of pitch-pine knots, mining tools, a crude bellows and forge, and other articles that would be damaged by partial exposure. When completed, the structure was fifty feet in length, sixteen in width, and twelve in height to the eaves.

For better protection against the cold, a double roof was built over the cabins proper. The pine logs out of which the building was constructed were squared and mortised at the joints; a stiff adobe mixed with pine needles to hold it together — a crude substitute for mortar — chinked the interstices and was plastered around and over the boulders that built up the chimneys.

They were quite proud of their job when it was completed, and it certainly was an advance on the usual log-cabin architecture. In the meantime they had been reinforced by Donovan, much against his will; for at the end of ten days he had toiled up the steep trail, not to resume work,

but to replenish his depleted buckskin purse, in order to renew and prolong the distracting delights of town. He had had the time of his life, as was testified by his bleared and blackened eyes and sundry cuts and bruises resulting from exciting arguments and differences of opinion with acquaintances who were enjoying like relaxations. Wakefield's remonstrances against a renewal of the debauch and representations of the urgent need of his help prevailed. A few days' rest and abstinence restored his vigor, and he was soon in his old form and a welcome and valuable recruit. Orders for a liberal supply of grub were placed at the Downieville store and a packtrain of jackasses climbed its way up the steep trail laden with goods and provisions. These included a half-ton of flour and several sacks of buckwheat and corn meal for variety, fat sides of bacon and a barrel of pork, a hundredweight of Chilli beans and a couple of bags of rice, boxes of yeast powders, canned oysters, and dried apples, sardines for a Sunday luxury, and coffee and tea *ad lib.* Paregoric and essence of ginger, quinine and pills, court plaster, and five gallons of whiskey stocked the medicine chest; and warm woollen shirts and canvas trous-

ers, top and gum boots, suggested warmth and bodily comfort. When these were packed away in their proper places, the flour and cereals carefully guarded against the poaching proclivities of the pestilent wood rat, they felt as if they were comfortably provisioned and could endure the longest and severest of winters. This finished, trees of suitable dimensions were felled and rolled to the edge of the bank, the caved dirt cleared away, the cut widened and the sides buttressed with heavy timbers, making a covered approach that would keep out the snow and a roomy place to frame and saw the sets for holding up the tunnel.

CHAPTER III

THE CHRISTENING OF THE CAMP

THIS preliminary toil had consumed a month's time, but it was well done, and while they faced almost complete isolation it would be solitude minus hardship and exposure. Nor was there a sense of complete detachment from the world. The waters of the North Fork in a deep canyon murmured over the rocky bed seemingly almost at their feet, although it was a sheer descent of two thousand feet to its level, and the roofs of the clustered buildings of the important mining hamlet of Downieville could be glimpsed through the spaces between the giant pines that grew on the precipitous mountain-sides. Far up on the north bank of the canyon and on a level with their own dwelling-place nestled Monte Cristo, aptly named, for the yield of the channel was the reality of a miser's dream. The crest of the Sierra Buttes pierced the blue at a height of nearly nine thousand feet, not more than twenty miles to the east; while the peaks of Saddle Back and Fir Top loomed heaven-

ward to the north. From their own camp it was an ascent of four thousand feet to the summit of Table Mountain; and Baldy, a thousand feet higher and crowned with a perpetual snow-field, blocked the vision beyond. It was a wilderness of towering peaks and profound canyon depths, of howling blasts, blinding storms, and a torrential rush of mad waters; and yet there was the knowledge that the town on the Fork was not inaccessible in an emergency, and that over the ridge there were neighbors who could be reached when the snow packed hard enough to bear a man's weight. In fact, it had been planned that at least once a week one member of the party should visit Downieville and bring back the mail. The letters from home were prized too much to permit the thought of being deprived of the precious messages for months, and periodicals were also a necessity. With the aid of snowshoes it was believed that the trip could be made without much difficulty, a belief that was justified by later experience.

The storms, barring an occasional flurry, had held off until the party had attacked their mining problem in earnest and the five were busy driving the tunnel. But where was Rance? A

month had elapsed and nothing had been heard of him or his whereabouts, and they began to be somewhat sceptical as to his return. "Faith! he was n't born to be a cook," said Mike, "and he 's tired of the job, although he was a janius." Their own efforts had not been entirely satisfactory, and they missed Rance's deft skill in the concoction of palatable and savory messes, as well as his light-hearted, boyish comradeship. Still he had been, so to speak, born to the purple. The dullest among them caught a glimmering of the incongruity of the occupation that had been thrust upon him and entertained a belief that the disgrace of it had been so borne in that he was willing to sacrifice his share in the rich prize rather than resume the menial duties.

They were mistaken, for one afternoon Rance came toiling up the trail and was received with a welcome that demonstrated the affection in which he was held. But what a change there was from the old Rance — this thin, worn, pallid spectre that appeared on the scene! Had he grazed some almost mortal illness or met with an accident that had sapped his strength and vigor?

"Oh, I 'm all right, boys," he exclaimed, not-

ing their sympathetic and wondering survey, "or I will be shortly; but old Charon had his boat ready, and I came pretty near crossing to the other side while I was gone. You see, I got into an argument at Sacramento with a damned hound,—he won't argue any more with anybody this side of hell,—and in the heat of it he put a bullet through my lung. That 's three weeks ago, and I had little hope of seeing Slug Canyon again; but it's pretty nearly healed up now, although it took about all the strength I had left to make the top of the trail."

He was panting for breath as kind hands assisted him to the cabin, and a rest revived him sufficiently to enable him to get outside and view the improvements.

"My, boys, you have done a pile of work since I went away, have n't you?" he said. "This is almost as comfortable as some of the nigger quarters on the plantation, and you need not take any offence at the comparison, for we took pretty good care of them. How is the claim? Who 's been doing the cooking? Has Tex been showing you how they messed on the border?"

He rattled on, and they explained that the one fly in the honey was the conduct of the culinary

department; and while of course he was not strong enough to tackle it just yet, they hoped with his advice and supervision to improve it at least.

"Oh, pshaw! I will be all right in a week; the doctor said that the mountain air would do me more good than medicine, and I feel better already. But say, what do you call the camp? This is altogether too pretty for 'Slugtown.' "

It was explained that more important matters had claimed the attention of the party. "Slug Camp" it had been all the way up the canyon; to "Slugtown" the Downieville traders directed their supplies; and really, while that was vulgar, prosaic, and not at all felicitous, still "Slug Diggings" was as appropriate and possibly more forcible and direct than many of the coarse and uncouth names borne by neighboring settlements.

To this Rance demurred.

"Our nest is altogether too grand to be degraded by that sort of thing. Let's hold a council after supper and think up something more in harmony."

And they did, gathered around the big fireplace. The nights were stinging cold; a huge backlog glowed in its ample depths, banked by

resinous pine knots and oak limbs; the cheery flames leaped up the chimney, crackling sparks coruscating and exploding in miniature fireworks; the bright light was reflected on the faces of the group, illumining the features of the solemn conclave in playing lights and shadows, while they wrestled with the problem gravely and seriously, as if the selection would have an occult influence on the future luck of the place.

Mike broke the silent meditations with a suggestion that smacked of his native city—"Dublin Flat."

This met with unanimous objection. "You're a long way from the 'ould sod'; forget you're Irish," said Rance. One of the Ohioans offered "Grizzly Hill"; but there were already innumerable hills, flats, and ravines dotting the foothills from Mariposa to Siskiyou that had appropriated Bruin's cognomen. The younger brother feebly advanced "Buckeye Camp," but that possessed about the same claim to originality. Tex could think of nothing better than "Alamo"; but that ill-starred battle ground was a misfit, although Rance said that it was a fight for independence,—a far-fetched analogy. "If I should consult my feelings," he added, "when I reached

the end of the steep trail this afternoon and lay down under the old pine by the cabin, I should say 'Heavenly Rest.'" This was debated at considerable length but was ultimately rejected as too sentimental.

"There won't be much rest here this winter, anyway," remarked Rance, "and those fellows over at Hepsidam and Jericho would turn it into 'Hell's Hollow,' or worse. See what they did to 'Grassmead' on the other side of the mountain. 'Ain't that a pretty name for a pile of tailings and a worked-out camp?' said an irreverent joker from Chipp's Diggings to his companion as they were passing by on the trail that bordered what had been one of those numerous little grass-grown meadows in the swale of the mountains, but which had been upturned and overturned until bare bedrock and piles of boulders were all that remained. '"Grassmead!"' he reiterated with a snort of disgust, '"Hell's Half Acre" would fit it better!' The name stuck, and so it was known from that time on. Come, Wakefield, it's your ante."

The dean smiled, and to continue the simile, came into the game, and words of wisdom fell from his lips.

"Well, boys, there are a half-dozen of us,—why not 'The City of Six'?" There was no dissenting voice; it was euphonious, dignified, and out of the common. There was poured into each tin cup a dram from the demijohn, and with libations to the wood gods, the camp was so christened; so it remained through all the varying fortunes of its existence; and to this day, when it is but a scarred and ugly blot on the landscape, it is known and referred to as "The City of Six."

"That is off our minds, anyway," soliloquized Rance; "but after all it is pagan land, and we are pagans. Some of these mornings you will see Pan with his pipes come dancing down the glade; and if he should bring a few nymphs with him, I reckon they would get a welcome."

"It's a haythen god he is," laughed Mike; "and if it's like the pictures I've been seeing of them, and that poor for clothing they show, if they should waltz along now, it's a warm pair of breeches Mr. Pan will feel the want of, and woollen petticoats for the nymphs as you name them. It's Bacchus I'd rather see coming over the trail."

It was the middle of November, and on the

morrow after the christening earnest work began. With only a vague idea of the details of the task before them and no experience in drift mining outside of Wakefield's brief observations at Kanaka Flat, yet not doubting that they could meet and overcome any difficulty, with confidence and self-reliance they attacked the face of the hillside. It was an awkward and slow process, and the results of each day's toil were painfully small for the amount of hard labor and muscle expended. Ages ago, a stream had curved through the channel which they were opening, a tributary to a mighty river that had been suddenly blotted out by a volcanic overflow. The long-extinguished craters of the Sierra chain had belched out torrents of mud and liquid lava, choking up the channels, covering the hills and valleys with a blanket of fine clay. The waters of the running rivers dried up from the heat of the fierce fires that lighted the mountain crests, the molten torrent swept down from the peaks and buried beneath the overflow the ancient channels, and for centuries the beds remained, the rounded boulders, pebbles, and sands distributed as when the waters rippled over them or,

in torrential seasons, dashed and eddied earth and rock in a mad rush of melting snow and ice.

In the lapse of uncounted years the old organic remains, the leaves, driftwood, and vegetation, decayed and, uniting with the iron and minerals, had cemented the gravel into a mass as hard as rock. In the gradual erosion of the quartz veins that seamed the granite, the gold had sifted, rolled, and had been ground into particles and scattered through the gravels and over the bed of the dead rivers, the cataclysm of the volcanic period securely locking up the portals to this rich deposit until the lure of gold betrayed its hiding place. It was weary and almost discouraging toil, this breaking into the well-guarded treasure chest; for the cemented gravels resisted the blow of the pick and crowbar, and carrying in a tunnel, seven feet in height and of equal width, was painfully slow in progress. At the best a foot per day was about the limit, but there were signs and indications of a handsome reward. The gravel for two feet above the bedrock paid a dollar to the pan, and in the crevices of underlying granite, nuggets and coarse gold were packed away in stimulating profusion.

In the parlance of the time, they had "struck it rich" and smiling Fortune beckoned them on. Perhaps they were approaching that *ignis fatuus* of the pioneer, the much discussed and sought-after golden stream that had enriched the shallower places below, that puzzle of a thousand theories, the "Source."

CHAPTER IV

WINTER AND ITS ENJOYMENTS

SUDDENLY came the cold breath of winter choking the springs and solidly freezing the running streams. Masses of leaden, dark, ominous clouds floated in from the south and obscured the sky, a fierce wind swept over the mountains, and a storm broke in all the fury of howling gale and flying snow. For days the white flakes sifted down or flew before the tempest gusts, so completely filling the air that the vision could penetrate but a short distance, choking up the canyon and piling big banks and deep drifts where the giant tree trunks barred the rushing winds. The cabin was almost buried out of sight, and the way to the tunnel was blocked by a depth of ten feet of snow. Then the storm ceased; the clouds rolled away; the blue sky was serene above them; the sun shone, and near and far a visible world stood transformed,—a colorless, blinding world, save and except the dark foliage of the pines and their sombre trunks, the only contrast to the diamond-studded, white

mantle that blanketed mountain-peak, hillside, and canyon, and spread a glittering robe, sparkling in the sunshine, as far as the eye could see.

It gave them all a sense of loneliness, an oppressive feeling of remoteness and isolation relieved in part by the sight of the ascending smoke wreaths, curling up from invisible chimneys and vanished town on the river-bank below. There was life in this white wilderness, there were companions in the seeming solitude, and then the storm did not interfere with their work. All this had been foreseen and provided for, and beyond cutting a path from cabin to drift and shovelling away the crushing weight on the roof, there was nothing to prevent a continuance of the daily routine. Their only privation was in the larder; fresh meat was no longer a part of their diet, for with the storm disappeared every trace of game except an occasional whirring grouse that broke through the icy crust from its nest under a pine log and sought its food among the tree-tops. The pursuit of these was impracticable, as the snow was too soft and deep to permit a successful following. The camp settled down to beans and bacon and such palatable messes as Rance—who had fully recovered from his

wound—concocted. It was no hardship; their appetites were unlimited, and fried oysters—the canned variety—for Sunday morning breakfast were dished up fit for a king, and rice puddings, apple duff, and other toothsome and unexpected creations testified to Rance's skill and resourceful art.

Barring one or two incidents it was a most quiet winter. The cabins were weather-tight, warm, and comfortable. By consent Rance and Wakefield occupied one wing, utilizing it also for kitchen and dining-room; while Mike, Tex, and the brothers bunked in the other. Their chief amusement was an interminable series of games of euchre, the score religiously kept and with varying fortune. It really did not much matter which side was ahead, as it was a trial of skill with no stakes at issue; but it served to pass away the dull evenings before early bedtime, and was about on a level with the intellectual capacity of the quartette. On the other side of the house the situation was somewhat different. Rance had had all the advantages that school and college could give, and that comprised enough to carry him through to graduation creditably and with honor. This, with a smatter-

ing of a little Greek and less Latin, bestowed upon him that indefinite but certain hall-mark of a gentleman, so far as such standards go. Truly, in knowledge and experience he was but a boy, a frank, careless youngster, whose pride and cleanly mind had disgusted him with the only career that had seemed to open to him, that of professional gambler, and — paradox of choice — to bring no degradation in his role of cook and caterer. To be sure, it was not for hire; that would have been impossible. On the contrary, there was a sense of superiority. Any one could swing a pick or handle a shovel, given the physique; but to create appetizing and unlooked-for results from common material — that was beyond the capacity of his comrades and was a solace and reward for what otherwise would have been a menial and distasteful occupation.

On the other hand, Wakefield was of a different mould. His mental machinery worked at a slower, if perhaps surer stroke. Self-reliant, self-willed, and self-contained, he arrived at conclusions slowly that when reached he held to tenaciously. He was too charitable to others' opinions to be charged with obstinacy, and always appeared to give due weight to them; but he

had a way of holding to his beliefs so firmly and yet withal so modestly, that at the end of the discussion his views were usually adopted. The Little Red School-house had equipped him with the elementary schooling, and nature had endowed him with the rare gift of common sense. Although greatly Rance's senior, he had had less contact with the world, a narrower range to draw from. The workings of his mind were slow, but facts grasped and lessons learned were retained; they sank deep into his consciousness and there remained, gradually filling a mental storehouse to be drawn on as occasion served. Rance's brilliancy and youthful spirits attracted him, and insensibly the pair had grown fond of each other, an affection tempered with respect and mutual understanding.

So, on this side of the cabin the atmosphere was somewhat different. Not that good comradeship did not obtain. There was the supper together, and that over, the inevitable smoke, when all burnt incense in the black bowls of their clay pipes and filled the room with the pungent odor of the Virginia weed. It was during this half-hour that the happenings of the day were gone over, the progress and development of the

tunnel, the prospects for an early spring, the conjectures as to the doings in neighboring camps, varied with Mike's recollections of droll experiences in which Irish wit and pugnacity figured, and in which it was noted he always came off first best; or Tex revived memories of the struggle that achieved Texan independence, inspired in the relation to an uncouth, rugged, but most convincing eloquence. This over and the pipes smoked out, the quartette retired, and with their absence the pair took to higher conversational flights.

By some queer freak the reading matter accumulated in a haphazard way included a copy of Shakespeare. It looked out of place alongside the current literature circulating in the mining regions at that time. Pioneers will remember the stock that the newsman added to his periodical list, and the quaint odd-shaped paper-covered novels issued by a Philadelphia publishing firm which seemed to have a monopoly of the California trade The most popular was a series by one G. W. M. Reynolds, under the title of "The Mysteries of the Court of London," eight volumes which shed a baleful and immoral light on the secret history of George IV. Then

there was "The Count of Monte Cristo." Oh, great Dumas, how many weary hours of the "old boys" your fascinating pages changed into evenings of delight!—and when followed by "The Three Musketeers" how they clamored for each succeeding book, admiring D'Artagnan, loving Porthos, giving fair homage to Athos, and secretly disliking the unfrocked churchman, Aramis. What great stories they were, and how it seemed as if the romance of the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV were not out of harmony with the early foothill days! How few know of or can realize the indebtedness that the Argonauts owed to the elder Dumas! Dickens was in the first flush of the success of "Pickwick Papers" and "Nicholas Nickleby," and they laughed over the quaint Cruickshank illustrations and the humor and oddity of the text; yet despite Bret Harte's tribute, Little Nell and Smike were somewhat mawkish to their tastes, and Paul Dombey an unnatural prodigy. Then there was a weird, melodramatic tale, "The Monk," by one Lewis—a creepy, powerful story, that circulated through the mining camps in hundreds of copies, and Pollard's "Quaker City" of the same ilk and popularity. With these there appeared

a yellow-backed literature, "Dick Turpin and Black Bess," "Sixteen String Jack," "The Highwayman of Hampstead Heath," and other tales of the knights of the road. Like the early days, these exciting stories have faded into oblivion. That was the sort of mental food they fed on, candle alongside the bunk, during those lonely nights, and were none the worse for the diet.

CHAPTER V

STUDY AND WORK

IT came to pass that the hour of relaxation before early bedtime was given up to a study and discussion of Shakespeare's plays, although neither history nor romance had interested or appealed to Wakefield's mind. Casually, one evening Rance had picked up the book; a passage in "The Merchant of Venice" caught his eye and he read it aloud to his partner. He was a good reader, possessed of a deep, rich, sympathetic voice, apt in dramatic emphasis at the right place, and the words fell like music on Wakefield's ear.

"The moon shines bright: in such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did kiss the trees
And they did make no noise, in such a night
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls
And sighed his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night.

"In such a night,
Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew
And saw the lion's shadow ere himself
And ran dismayed away.

"In such a night
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
Upon the wild sea banks, and waft her love
To come again to Carthage."

Wakefield walked quietly to the door, threw it open, and looked up at the stars. The crescent moon hung pendent over the pine-tree tops, the moonbeams sifted through the foliage, and with the zephyr's breath the light and shadow wove lacework on the white snow. And in silence he looked and looked again in a maze and whirl of newborn thought. A thousand times he had gazed without emotion to skies as diamond-studded and the same pale orb of light, but had seen not. The harmony of the words had served as a magic formula to drop the veil from blinded eyes, and a sense of hitherto unknown beauty was conveyed to his soul. There were things unseen that needed but this revelation to open a new world and from that night Wakefield sat at the feet of the Stratford bard and drank knowledge, wisdom, and lore from an inexhaustible fount. Not that he grasped the meaning of it all at once,—his mental processes were slow and laborious,—but it gradually quickened his intellect and awakened him to the knowledge that

"there were more things in heaven and earth than his philosophy dreamt of." While Rance did not participate to the full in this newborn enthusiasm it was more to his taste than the relaxations of the other wing of the house, and he readily gave his evenings to the reading, interpretation, and discussion of the plays. So the winter nights were passed in this creative literary atmosphere, and the feuds of the rival houses of Montague and Capulet, the wooing of Desdemona, the sorrows of pitiful King Lear, the melancholy Dane, fat Jack Falstaff, and the rest of those immortal beings, were "summoned like spirits from the vasty deep," and in fancy "strutted and fretted their hour upon the stage." Before that winter passed Wakefield had enlarged his horizon, idealized his previous gross materialism, and rounded out a completeness of life undreamed of before.

This was only the by-play. Rance had fashioned a pair of Norwegian snowshoes and by practice had become fairly expert in their use. Once a week by their aid he visited Downieville, got the mail, bought the latest newspapers on sale, made a little pack which he strapped to his back, and returned to the "City." It con-

sumed about half an hour to make the descent and six hours to climb back, but his hardened muscles responded easily to the task. Everybody got letters except Tex, who, according to his story, with the exception of a brother whose whereabouts were unknown, had neither wife, chick, nor relation so far as he knew, and while at times envying his comrades the pure pleasure they got from these home missives, consoled himself by the belief that when he had made his pile, his matrimonial eligibility would be so enhanced that he would be able to pick up a prize if so minded.

As the partners became more accustomed to the new phase of mining, they acquired expertness, and by the middle of February of the new year, had driven in their tunnel over one hundred feet as well as pushed lateral drifts, or crosscuts, to the boundaries of the channel. By these they discovered that the old river had an average breadth of seventy feet, and on both sides the bedrock rose up abruptly, completely cutting off the gravel formation and filling the ends of the crosscuts with solid rock. They had also caught on to the knack of timbering, and supported the ground with heavy beams, thus preventing

any danger of a cave-in. Better still, there were numerous indications that they were in good ground. The gold-bearing stratum averaged about three feet in thickness, although the rich pay streak was not more than six inches, and the best of it all lay directly on top of the bed-rock and in the crevices and inequalities of the rock bottom of the old river-bed. The half-foot averaged a dollar to the pan, while from the bedrock itself they had frequently panned out from an ounce to five ounces from a candle-boxful (two pans) of the choice scrapings. Then they had picked out several nuggets, one weighing four ounces; and one of the Ohioans ran across a quartz boulder as big as his two fists, that was seamed through and through with thin veins of gold. This they had put aside as a specimen without attempting to break it up and ascertain the value of its contents. It afforded them some amusement in the way of a guessing match as to its probable yield, ranging all the way from fifty to two hundred and fifty dollars. It was finally agreed that each should put his name and a figure on a piece of paper, place it in a sealed envelope, and in the spring they would take the boulder to town and apply the specific

gravity test, the one nearest the mark to keep the boulder for his own.

Beyond a lay-off, the holidays had gone by unnoticed. Mike took a three days' vacation at Christmas and came back vowing that he had disgraced himself, having indulged in neither shindy nor spree, neither had he gorged himself with square meals at the hotels.

"Faith, they haven't got any more variety than we have, and in the matter of cooking, Rance can give them cards and spades and then bate them."

His excuse for not falling into temptation was characteristic.

"Sure," he said, "I'm getting to be a solid man, what with the share that's coming to me and what I already hev stuck away in a few ould yeast-powder cans. It doesn't become me as a capitalist to be squandering me gains for the benefit of a lot of blood-suckers and gin-mill keepers. Besides, it would be a reflection on the good name of 'The City of Six.' If we had called it 'Dublin Flat,' as I mintioned, a trifle of liquor would go well with the name, but as it is, I 'll give the whiskey the go-by for the prisent. Mind ye," he thoughtfully added, "I promise

nothing for the spring except if I don't touch it for six months, why should I for six years, if I be so minded?"

The fact was that Mike, whose sprees had been more a question of good-fellowship with chance acquaintances than a taste for liquor itself, had, when he found himself on the road to wealth, indulged in serious reflections as to the future. He was a shrewd Irishman and the prospect of independence financially was more alluring to him that the role of a roistering spendthrift, and without any promises he had made an inward resolution to lead a life of dignified sobriety. Therefore he bore the good-natured bantering of his companions and their affected wonderment with complacency and was more than pleased with the approval of Wakefield and Rance, whom, in his warm-hearted Irish way, he regarded with affection and respect.

Their mining scheme in one direction had slipped a cog. With four or five feet of snow covering the ground, the possibility of a scarcity of water had not entered their minds, and they had reckoned on washing the pay dirt as soon as extracted; but here they were at fault. They had not taken into account the long, zero-cold

nights and the almost sunless days. Their claim was on the north slope of the mountain, and in clear days the sun shone over the crest of the ridge on their camp not more than a couple of hours. As a consequence, for drinking and cooking purposes melted snow was their only recourse, while for gravel-washing there was none except what trickled out from the drainage of the tunnel, and that froze almost as quickly as it reached the open air. At first they were puzzled as to what to do to get around this obstacle, but finally Tex suggested an expedient that partially solved the problem. His idea was to excavate a chamber some thirty feet from the mouth of the tunnel large enough to hold a rocker and a tub for panning, hollow out a hole for a pool in the bedrock, and let the drainage water flow in and out. By this they would have sufficient water to rock the richest of the gravel and pan the bedrock scrapings. The remainder of the dirt extracted could be wheeled out and dumped in the head of the ravine until the thaw and melting snows of the springtime furnished a Tom head, when a grand cleaning up of the winter's work could be had. As the temperature at thirty feet inside was at least thirty degrees

higher than in the open air it worked nicely, and the little company were gratified with daily tangible proofs of the extraordinary richness of their ground. After the adoption of this method the average daily yield was over one hundred dollars, which, with the unknown but valuable asset of the ever-accumulating dump pile in the canyon, made them more than content with their lot.

CHAPTER VI

THE GIANT NUGGET

THE channel gravel was mixed with boulders of white quartz from six inches to two feet in diameter, which had to be wheeled out; and they had disposed of them by walling up both sides of the open cut and beyond with these rocks, building up a solid wall two feet thick and five feet in height. These were muddy and clay-stained, and no particular attention had been paid to them. Rance, who had added blacksmithing to his accomplishments and spent an hour daily at the crude forge set under the timber roof sharpening pick points and crowbars, noted the drip of water from the melting snow overhead, and as it fell upon the wall, the contrast between it and the glassy white quartz where it had washed away the adhering clay. It was an idle and purposeless gaze, yet was suddenly fixed by what seemed to be a splash of glittering yellow. He rubbed his eyes and looked again, distrusting the accuracy of his vision, but it was still there. The dropping water had exposed a

clean surface of about a hand's-breadth, and through it ran a two-inch streak of solid gold. Still doubting his senses he went to the forge, and, getting a dipper full of water, cleaned away a larger space, which not only exposed six inches more of the precious metal in the vein, but brought to light a dozen smaller and intersecting streaks. Then he went into the tunnel, procured a bucketful, and repeated the cleansing process until all of the rock not embedded in the wall was brought to view. It was a pretty sight—splashes, streaks, and veins of gold running over it in every direction, apparently more metal than quartz in its make-up. Rance stood for a time fascinated, then turned as weak as a sick kitten, until it finally oozed into his brain that he was neither drunk nor crazy, and that he had discovered the daddy of all nuggets so far as heard from. Grasping this idea, his next mood was one of intense gratification that he had been the lucky one; for at times he had been somewhat disquieted with the thought that his comrades were bearing the brunt of the hard work and that he was having an easier task than that alloted to his partners. Here, however, he could even up accounts, although he had had no part

in unearthing it from the channel. With these thoughts flitting through his mind, he hung an old sack over the boulder, and going to the tunnel yelled to his comrades to come forth, which they did with all speed, fearing that an accident had happened to their chum. They were somewhat mystified when he drew them up in a row facing the sack, asking not to be interrupted, and then with the air of a showman, directed them to fix their eyes on it. Counting "one, two, three," he whisked the covering away and stepped aside to watch the effect. Mike's eye caught it first, and with a "Holy mother of Moses!" he sprang to the wall, followed by the rest. The Ohioans shouted, Tex gave a whoop that could have been heard on the river, and Wakefield grasped Rance's hand with a grip that disabled that member for the rest of the afternoon.

Recovering from their unqualified astonishment, the first impulse, acted on at once, was to remove the boulder from the wall and give it a critical examination. It was taken out, carried to the blacksmith's tub, and washed, the cleansing process demonstrating that the greater part of it was virgin gold. Then it was moved to the

"He drew them up in a row, facing th ck, and whisked th

cabin and placed on the table, and the partners sat around gloating over its size and beauty and speculating on its value. Rance rehearsed the details of his discovery, his doubt and incredulity, his final conviction, the turmoil of brain, the ensuing recovery of mental equilibrium, the dramatic surprise planned for his comrades, and the feeling that the pleasure of revealing the find almost exceeded the joy of discovery. To their credit be it said that while not one of them would have been capable of such an action, there came to each the question as to what he would have done in like circumstances. It would have been so easy to have re-daubed it with mud, removed it from the wall, and hidden it away. Perhaps they were grateful not to have been tempted, human nature is so weak. Rance modestly disclaimed any credit — some of them would have run across it before long. And then came guessing relative to its value and as to what should be done with it. No one pretended to closely estimate its worth; there were no scales on which to weigh it, and if there had been they would have merely given the weight of the mass. Tex and the brothers were for breaking it up, separating the gold from the quartz, and chipping

the metal into pieces small enough to weigh on the little gold-scales, the utmost capacity of which was but five ounces. This was negatived, at least for the present, and then Mike made a suggestion which seemed to meet the emergency.

"Let's pick out a boulder as near the size of this one as we can find. Av coorse it will be having no gold into it; it does n't stand to rayson that there can be many more like it."

"Why not?" interjected Tex. "There is as much reason for another one as for this. Let us go down in the cut and wash off the wall. I would n't be surprised if there were a dozen more."

That view met with unanimous approval, and with one accord they started for the door, but halted as Mike said,

"What! lave that lump of beauty alone on the table while we are pothering around looking for more, and some one coming along to take it away with him, the dirty thafe!"

The absurdity of such a happening did not strike them, nor the fact that for over three months there had been neither visitor nor passer-by. There on the table was visible and tangible

wealth. Murder had been done for less, and it was better to take no risks.

Thoughtful Wakefield passed his hand over his forehead and remarked that it might be a dream, and they would all wake up directly and wonder at the vividness of it; at which Rance pooh-poohed and bade them go ahead.

"I have supper to get. You are all in a trance now, but you will be hungry enough when you come out of it. Be off with you, and I will take care of the nugget."

For an hour they worked industriously, bringing out buckets of water from the rocker pool and scouring the face of the wall. In vain; not a speck of gold could be found, and it must be confessed that they were disappointed, for their cupidity had been stimulated to a high pitch, and when they again assembled in the cabin the precious boulder seemed to have shrunk into smaller dimensions.

"Well, you are a queer lot," laughed Rance, "and it's hard to satisfy you. The next one I find, I'll roll it down the hill, and then there will be no occasion for disgust."

"Yes, of course you will," retorted Wakefield;

"but, Rance, it must have come from somewhere, and there is no argument to prove that there is no more."

"Of course, it is from somewhere," flung back Rance. "Look at it, round and smooth, ground and polished as it rolled down the river bed, and it is from the source where all the rest of the gold in the channel came from. Maybe you can tell us where that was, and what sort of a country this was when this old, dried-up, played-out stream was running bank-full two thousand feet above the Yuba River. Come on and eat your supper, and don't worry over theories."

They fell to, not with very hearty appetites and more or less depressed; the reaction from the excitement told upon their spirits.

"Well, I swear I wish I had never found it," scolded Rance; "you are a nice lot of men. If it had been double the size, I expect you would have all gone out and hung yourselves on the old pine tree."

Thus rallied, they began to get back into their old form, and Mike's suggestion was recalled. A boulder approximating the precious one in dimensions was brought up to the cabin; in size the barren rock was equal to the nugget, but by

mere test of hand the latter was double in weight. Mike's idea was to improvise a balance by adjusting a crowbar on a cross-piece of steel, the latter supported on two benches; the crowbar kept from slipping by wiring it loosely to the cross-piece, which was done. Then the nugget was slung to one end of the bar and a hundred-pound sack of flour to the other. The flour was the heavier, but a ten-pound can of coffee on the nugget restored the equilibrium. Result, the gold and quartz weighed approximately about ninety pounds. Then a fifty-pound sack of rice replaced the flour; the barren boulder, the nugget. The rice was the weightier, and it took the ten-pound can of coffee to balance up the boulder, less four full yeast-powder cans at four ounces each. It followed that the barren boulder weighed forty-one pounds, the nugget ninety pounds; hence there was forty-nine pounds of gold, or over ten thousand dollars.

"I guess we have got no complaint coming," said the Dean; "that is over fifteen hundred dollars apiece for one day's work, and there is plenty more where it came from."

"Hould on there, ye blundering figurers," roared Mike, "ten thousand, is it? What's the

difference between Troy and avirdapoise? Tell me that. Me schooling was neglected, although Father Dunn tried to bate that into me thick skull, but ye don't weigh gould the same as you do bafe. Is it more or liss? Sure, I'll give up me share if I've taken a penny off the value of the beauty."

But he had not. There were four ounces more to be counted to the pound and twenty-five hundred dollars added to its worth. The process was crude, and the result would probably vary a pound or two when its exact weight should be determined; but it was conceded that they were richer by almost fourteen thousand dollars than before the find had been made.

For a week the partners worked on feverishly and with a half-formed belief that their luck would lead to another and perhaps bigger find. Careful examination was made of every stone extracted, but there were no nuggets discovered. The gravel, however, gave no indication of falling off in value, and they had to content themselves with an average of an ounce a day or thereabouts. It was finally decided not to break up the rich boulder, but to cache it away until spring. A hole three feet deep was dug in

the centre of the dining-room, and there it was buried out of sight, the dirt packed down tightly over it, and there it remained until its final disposal.

For a time there was a conscious change in their attitudes to one another, a spirit not of distrust, but of vague unrest. The good-fellowship abated a degree, the euchre games lost their zest, Tex was less voluble, the brothers drew off into corners and planned a future that eliminated the foothills, and Mike's cheery jokes and sarcasm lost their point. On the other side of the cabin Rance no longer read Shakespeare aloud; the Dean pored over the volume with a far-away look in his eyes that indicated no very close attention to the text. As for Rance, his occupation suddenly became distasteful, and while he did not resign, it was understood that with the closing of winter and the end of the season's work, his place as cook would have to be filled by some other one of the partners. He was dreaming dreams of a return to civilization, to a companionship with the gentler sex, and an abandonment of his present semi-barbarous existence. It seemed as if the discovery of the nugget had loosed from imprisonment some baleful spirit,

an imp of discontent that hovered around the place and drove away the former good cheer and jolly fellowship.

So far, however, all had gone well, and the partners did their best to shake off the depression and restore the old atmosphere, and would probably have succeeded had not a tragedy brushed them close.

CHAPTER VII

THE LYNCHING

ONE Sunday afternoon Rance returned from his regular mail trip to Downieville, disbevelled, trembling, and pale as a ghost. That he was laboring under strong excitement was evident, and his comrades gathered around him with sympathetic faces anxious for an explanation. His clothes were in disorder, his shirt torn, and there was every evidence that he had been a participant in some sort of row, from which they feared he had not escaped unscathed.

Waving his hands in the air he exclaimed,

"Oh, boys, it was horrible!"

"What was horrible? what is it? what is the matter with you, Rance?" demanded Wakefield, in a fever of anxiety.

"The matter?" cried Rance. "My God! the beasts! the hounds! they hung a woman in Downieville to-day—lynched her in cold blood, and we were powerless to save her."

The partners gazed at him incredulously. Such a thing was beyond belief; had he lost his

wits? Hang a woman! Impossible, even in so rough a community. Surely, if the gamblers and desperadoes had made such an attempt the miners would have wiped them off the face of the earth.

"The miners," retorted Rance, "they were the barbarians that did it," and he shook with emotion as he recalled the scene.

"Calm yourself, Rance," said Wakefield; "you surely had no hand in it. Tell us what has happened and how it came about."

"No, I had nothing to do with it except to try and save her; and they came within an ace of hanging me, too, the cowards."

Mike, who usually knew the right thing to do, went to the cabin, filled a cup half full of whiskey, and returning, forced it on Rance, who was in a state of collapse.

"You need a bracer," said Mike, "take a long drink and steady your nerves, and let us know what has come across you to get you in such a state."

Thus adjured, Rance gulped down the liquor and began his tale.

"I got into town about ten o'clock and went to the post-office after the letters and I met

Harry Thornton there. We shook hands and then he said, 'Rance, there is a lot of trouble on hand. A miner was murdered this morning, there is a rough crowd gathering, and it means mischief. I don't believe the mob will hurt the woman, but it is liable to turn loose and clean out the Greasers by way of retaliation.'

"'What woman?' I asked, 'what has she done? and how are the Mexicans concerned with it?'

"'Anita did the stabbing,' he replied.

"You know Anita," said Rance to his partners. They had all heard of or knew her. She was a little slip of a Mexican girl, a handsome type of her race, whose loose morals and profession were well understood throughout the camp, a woman no better nor worse than a dozen of her kind who made the town their dwelling-place.

"From what Thornton told me, the miner had been on a drunken carouse for a week. This morning, in a particularly ugly mood he attempted to force an entrance to Anita's house, and she refused to let him in, doubtless afraid that in his drunken state he would abuse her. Her refusal maddened him, and kicking the door in, he raised his hand to strike her, when crazy

with fear she drew a knife and plunged it into his heart. The fellow fell dead on the doorstep, and she ran screaming up the street and into the Magnolia Saloon, where she gasped out incoherently that she had stabbed a man. The sheriff took her to the log jail, and the dead man was brought to the court-house and laid out preparatory to a coroner's inquest. The town was full of miners — he was a miner from Poker Flat,— and some of the rougher spirits began to agitate the justice of cleaning out the 'Greasers.' The Mexicans, anticipating some such action, decamped down the river and out of harm's way, a move that balked and enraged the mob. The members headed back up the street, howling and yelling for vengeance and some one cried, 'Hang the —— !' Then they went wild, battered in the jail door, seized the poor woman, ran her down to the bridge over the river, fastened a rope to the rail and around her neck, and pushed her over. Great God! boys, would you believe that white men could do such a thing? It all happened after Harry began to tell me the trouble The gamblers scattered to cover, they were afraid the mob would turn its attention

to them; the merchants closed their doors and shut themselves inside their stores, white-livered cowards that they were. Harry and I drew our six-shooters, forced our way into the crowd, appealed and threatened, got knocked down and trampled on for our pains, and then they began to yell, 'Hang the damned Chivs!' and I reckon they would have done it, for they forced us on the bridge, but the ghastly sight of that body, twisting and turning over the river, her hands clenched in the rope at her throat, and her distorted face, sickened them as it sickened me, and the crowd melted away as quickly as it came together. That revulsion of feeling was all that saved us. They cut her down immediately, I don't know who; I could not stand the sight. Oh, it was awful!" and Rance covered his face with his hands, as if to shut out the vision. Recovering himself he added, "Worse than all, boys, the hounds took two lives, one unborn into the world."

Rance's narrative put them all out of sorts. It was incredible that such an inhuman, dastardly crime could have been perpetrated. Rance gradually recovered his equanimity, the letters

and papers served to turn their thoughts momentarily into other channels, although one and all denounced Downieville and the cowards that had stood by or sought cover while the tragedy was being enacted.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CITY OF SIX GROWS

THE Winter of '52-'53 was one of the most inclement ever experienced in California. Rains in the valleys and snowstorms in the mountains were almost continuous until early spring. Then there came a warm spell accompanied with a sou'easter, before which the snowdrifts disappeared as if by magic. Every ravine became a brawling torrent, the rivers a mad rush of wild waters, and the plains a vast lake. As the valleys were sparsely settled, but little damage was done beyond the drowning of a few cattle; while in the hills the raging streams merely obliterated the old work along their banks, sweeping away the flumes and sluices, restoring the bars to their original unvexed condition, here and there undermining a camp perched too near the water's edge, or cutting through a bend, making new channels and leaving dry the old ones. The equinoctial storms over, the warm sun shone through the lengthened days and the mysterious reincarnation of nature began: the foothills donned their

robes of green and gold; flowers spangled every hillock; the black oak put forth its tender leaves; the red berries clustered thickly on the manzanita boughs, a feast spread for the predatory grizzly; the piping quail that had retreated before the winter storms to the lowlands, paired off and sought the chamizal-clothed mountain-side and made their nests in its densest thicket; and the incomparable springtime of the Sierra slopes revivified and gladdened every living thing.

With it disappeared the depression and gloom bred of the loneliness of their winter retreat that had fallen on "The City of Six." They had come fairly well through the enforced companionship and close contact of a six months' association, a supreme test of character. Perhaps the Dean was more taciturn, his Shakespearean studies had stimulated his reflective faculties and made him somewhat impatient of the triteness of ordinary topics; Tex had become feverishly voluble and lived in the past of his border and Mexican war experiences; the hearts of the brothers — a commonplace and unromantic pair they were — turned to their old Ohio homes and the fat and fertile acres in which they longed to invest their riches; and light-hearted Rance,

since the tragedy on the river, had become peevish, morbid, and irritable. He fairly loathed the place and its surroundings, detested his occupation, and longed to get away to a more congenial environment.

Mike was the only partner who came through it all unchanged, or if changed, certainly for the better. As his hoard grew, so his self-esteem and self-reliance increased. A rollicking, devil-may-care, poverty-stricken son of the bog and a Celtic gentleman fairly well favored by fortune, were different individuals; and there were possibilities in the latter role which appealed to this shrewd, capable fellow. To a great extent he had displaced Wakefield as chief adviser, and that without any irritating arrogance or conscious usurpation. He had already planned a campaign ahead, which he proposed to submit at the right moment, and least in his mind was any contingency that involved the abandonment of the rich claim.

So matters stood at the end of April. They had penetrated the mountain-side quite two hundred feet, and the channel showed no sign of giving out. Their main and lateral drifts, with what coyoting they had done in the richer spots,

had yielded about twenty-two thousand dollars, besides the big nugget cached under the floor. There was a huge pile of gravel dumped in the head of the ravine, of unknown value; yet they knew the gold was sifted through it, for after a heavy rainstorm they could see the evidence of it in the shiny particles that spangled its surface. The melting snows provided plenty of water to wash it down, so they set the sluice and "long Tom" and began work. It took them ten days to complete the task; it was prolonged by the continual proof in the yellow-lined bottoms of the sluices of the necessity of slow and careful washing to prevent waste. Each night's clean-up resulted in a yield that nearly took their breath away, a prospect-pan brimful of coarse, rounded and polished gold from the size of mustard seed to lumps that ran into the ounces, and when it was all done and the harvest gathered, that pile of dirt, which had hardly been taken into calculation, added to their store forty-one thousand dollars.

It was a more cheerful crowd that gathered around the table that May night. After all, there had been no hardships, no sickness, no accidents; a little unstringing of the nerves per-

haps from the monotony of the life and the loneliness of it all, but here was their reward, over twelve thousand dollars to the share, and apparently their mining ground barely opened. Even Rance brightened up and took a less gloomy view of the camp. Of course, they all had their plans, diverging views, which while not irreconcilable, needed modification to meet the general good; and as the hour grew late Mike proposed that they postpone further discussion and give the next day to an effort to find common ground.

It was a warm, balmy spring day when the partners, impatient of the confinement between the log walls, sat down under a big sugar pine not too far away from the cabin, for there their treasure lay. With the disappearance of snow the old trails were once more trod; dwellers from the camps over the ridge paying long-deferred visits to the county seat, restless miners on the road hunting richer diggings and fresher fields, sports passing on horse and mule back, who neither toiled nor spun (except the ivory ball in the whirling roulette wheel) and yet were clothed in broadcloth (Rance viewed their apparel with envy as they passed by), and sinister-

looking Mexicans, mustang-mounted Greasers, who were watched with cautious glances, for Joaquin Murieta's band had been raiding, plundering, and murdering in the adjoining counties.

The first question was the disposal of the gold, and it was decided that the better plan would be to sell it outright to the express and bank agency at Downieville, if satisfactory terms could be had, or if not, to ship it by express to the U. S. Assay Office at San Francisco, where they would be sure of a fair deal. There was nearly four hundred pounds, including the nugget; but as the trail was all down hill, the six could manage between them to pack the treasure to a place of safety and without any great peril, as outside their own little band nobody knew the extent or value of their accumulations.

This settled, there came the weightier point of future operations, and each set forth his views and intentions. Wakefield announced that he meant to pay a visit to his old home, not to stay, but his heart was yearning for a sight of the wife and baby, not realizing that that same baby was now quite a young lady. Besides, the recent letters had warned him of his wife's failing health—incipient consumption, a friend

wrote; a little cough as she alluded to it,—and he planned to bring them back, to a home in the glorious, health-giving mountains.

Rance projected a long and pleasurable visit to San Francisco, perhaps a settling down in the budding city, although he wanted to retain his interest in the property and hinted at putting a competent substitute into the kitchen.

Tex had no plan. He was as well off here as elsewhere, perhaps better. There was no home for him to go back to, and no relatives or kin except a brother whom he had not seen for years and whose whereabouts were unknown. He might take a little *pasear* down to the Bay just for a change, and that over, was ready to get down to work again.

The brothers from Ohio had mutually and definitely decided to go back to the Buckeye State, purchase farms, and settle into their old life, as lived prior to their adventurous journey to the Pacific. They were willing to dispose of their interest in the claims to their partners at a reasonable price, to be agreed upon, or if not, to some outsider looking after a profitable investment.

This left Mike the last to announce his inten-

tions, which he did not seem to be in any haste to do. He had listened to his partners without any comment, and would have made none had they not insisted on knowing his plans. At last he said,

"I 'm not quite ready, byes, to tell ye what 's in me head, excipt it 's not me prisent intintion to run away from good fortune. Ye may think ye can find another piece of ground out of which ye may take siventy thousand dollars in a winter's work, or perhaps ye have got more money than ye can spind in the rest of your natural lives; but I 'm not holding to ayther one of thim opinions."

"Well, Mike," asked Wakefield, "what do you propose? Have you planned out the future for all of us?"

"I have me own ideas, but it 's a little airly to spake of thim. I 'm just as tired as the rist of ye of hard wurrk, and it 's little more I mane to do of it; it 's a boss I wud be, and I think I see not only me own, but a chanst for us all. I 'll make me proposal. It 's no rush we are in. Let 's dispose of our goold, take it aisy for a week, during which time I will be absint, then

we'll have a grand pow-wow and make up our minds what's best for to do."

Mike was obstinate and would say nothing further.

"It's not prepared to spake I am until I go over tó Forest City, Alleghany, and Moore's Flat. They're doing things over there I want to know about, and whin I come back we'll go into the matter at more length."

They yielded to his views. Mike had risen greatly in their respect during their comradeship, had proved resourceful, intelligent, and endowed with a store of good hard sense. And then withal, he was so jolly, good-natured, and brimming over with mother wit that he had, without seeking it, displaced Wakefield's tacit leadership, and that without protest on the latter's part. In fact, since Wakefield had yielded to the glamour of Shakespeare's pages he had become meditative and silent. The trouble was that much reading had plunged his mind into a yeasty condition—he was in an intellectual ferment. It was a serious question whether it was working good or evil; it had brought discontent with his condition without compensation in an

improvement. Wakefield was born to be a plodder, a sober, industrious, bourgeois citizen, not gifted to grapple with or solve world problems, nor had he troubled himself with them until the book fell into his hands. Since then he had grown morbid, aspiring to a broader life and wider knowledge, and not comprehending just how to attain his aspirations. What he needed was a change of scene, a contact with the busy outside world, and the chances were that his contemplated trip to the States would bring with it a cure.

The day following the five made the trip to Downieville with the treasure, Rance resolutely refusing to again visit what to him was an accursed spot; the proceeds were sold to the express company, including the nugget, for which they received the full fourteen thousand dollars they had estimated, and the total amount to their credit reached $77,000, for which they were given individual certificates of deposit, each to the amount of his share. The disposal of the gold lifted a burden of anxiety, and while a mere piece of paper was not quite as tangible as the dust, still it represented real wealth and was negotiable.

On their return, Rance signified his intention to accompany Mike on his tour of observation. The Irishman was delighted with the proposal, and the next morning they started for the camps over the ridge. They found that the same ancient channel in which they had been working extended across country for at least a dozen miles and was being exploited at many points where the gulches, canyons, and rivers had cut through and exposed it. Moreover, companies had been formed, new methods introduced, and the exploitation reduced to a system that made possible the mining and extraction of the gravel the full width of the channel, and gangs of men were employed at day wages to do the work, superseding the coöperative labor of the owners. Mike had got a hint of this from travellers on the old trail who had lingered for a chat, and it was this that had set him thinking of the possibilities of The City of Six mine. They also found lively growing hamlets of a thousand or more people, where six months previous there had been but a few log cabins. These camps were at the height of prosperity, and the scene of a wild, free, lawless life that equalled in excitement and recklessness the flush days of '49. It was a holiday for both

Mike and Rance, and while they did not yield to any of the seductive temptations and fought shy of both drink and hazard, it was a joy to rub elbows, so to speak, with their kind and to see new faces and fresh vistas of life. They were both in the best of spirits on their return, where they found their companions waiting somewhat impatiently. Without any unnecessary delay, Mike at once plunged into the subject, ably supported by Rance, who had become thoroughly convinced of the wisdom of Mike's ideas.

Briefly, he was persuaded they were all tired of hard work and solitude, even if they had been handsomely paid for their privations; but in his opinion they had hardly scratched the ground on their property. They were entitled, according to the mining laws adopted at neighboring camps, to three thousand feet on the channel; and as they had the only available opening, the old stream running into and under the mountain, they really commanded a couple of miles free from interference. His proposal was that they should form a company, of which each should own one-sixth of the shares. A manager and assistant should be appointed to take charge of

the mine, a gang of hired miners put to work, as many as they could profitably employ, and the property run on a big scale. The scheme was discussed, pro and con, and met with favor except from the brothers, who had concluded that they had had enough of mining and were going back home with no intention of returning. Still, they were willing to sell their interests at whatever price mutually agreed upon as just and reasonable. A bargain was soon struck, twenty thousand dollars for the third interest was fixed as a fair figure, and the sale concluded. Each of the remaining four owned a quarter interest. It was the end of The City of Six, so far as the name coincided with the number of inhabitants, and a breaking up of the primitive life of its founders.

Mike, urged to take the managership and nothing loth, consented to assume direction of affairs, and Tex was quite willing to act as his lieutenant. All of the legal documents required to consummate the arrangement were duly prepared, accepted, and signed; the corporation took on being as the Old Channel Mining Company, and the new era began.

The Ohioans gathered together their few be-

longings, bade their companions good-bye, and departed. A few days later, Wakefield took the trail for the lowlands, turning his footsteps homeward with considerable reluctance. However, his absence was to be but temporary; it was his avowed intention to return with wife and child before the summer was over. Rance lingered for a time. The charm of the independent, irresponsible life appealed to him with redoubled force, especially as the menial duties of cook were no longer necessary. Besides, he had taken a great liking to the big-hearted Irishman, and formed an admiration for his capabilities. He was convinced that the comparatively few thousands taken out of the property was but a small portion of what it would yield in the future, and if their expectations were realized, this meant an income that would command leisure, ease, and enjoyment. Then again, the region was at this time of the year a veritable paradise, the balmy air an intoxication to his senses; a siesta at full length under the shadow of the tree, on a soft bed of pine needles, invited an irresponsible loafing spell; yes, he would not hurry away, the summer was before him, he would just sit around

a while and watch Mike and Tex expend their stored-up energy.

These two worthies were more than content. Dozens of men passed along the trail daily, many of them willing to work, especially as the wage scale was fixed at an attractive figure, and by the end of the first week of the birth of the new company a gang of ten stalwart miners were busy making improvements. The first and most necessary addition was a bunk and boarding-house, built of logs, as sawed lumber was not available; the next, some one capable of running the "beanery," as they dubbed it, to the satisfaction of the boarders. One of the new men mentioned the fact that there was a widow over at Nigger Tent on the ridge who he thought was helping in that classically named wayside inn "for her keep."

CHAPTER IX

RUTH PROVES A TREASURE TO THE CAMP

"RANCE, ye lazy divil, ride over and fetch her back if ye have to bind her hands and feet and pack her on a mule. A woman, and a widdy at that! Sure The City of Six nades a little divarsity in its population. Besides," added Mike, "she 'll bring contint to the min; they 'll not mind whether it 's good or bad cooking she does, providing she 's not ould."

Rance, who by the way had picked up a young mustang and equipment at a bargain from an impecunious traveller, undertook the errand; the inn was down the ridge a dozen miles or so, and he was ready for any jaunt that promised a diversion. In a couple of days after his departure he reappeared walking beside his horse, the saddle occupied by a little woman, to whom he was paying profound deference. He had secured her services by promise of liberal wage, and duly introduced her to Mike as Mrs. Ruth Sage, originally from Boston and more recently a dweller at Nevada City, intimating

to the lady that Mike was the manager and responsible party, and would arrange satisfactory terms. His face broadened into a grin as he walked off to find Tex and tell him of the prize secured.

"Tex, she's a corker. I haven't had a chance to speak a dozen words since we left the Tent. She's told me her history and her affairs from the time she was a baby until her husband shook her over on Deer Creek, basely deserted her without cause, and left her alone and unprotected in this wild country; not that she cares, except the time wasted on that heartless man. Watch how she is rounding up Mike under the tree. I think she is inquiring as to the moral habits of the camp; she is dead set on a high standard."

It was evident that she was putting Mike through a rigid investigation, and he was ejaculating regularly, "Yes, ma'am," "No, ma'am," with bewildering frequency. That was as far as he got in that particular interview, which ended by her being escorted to the cabin, into which she disappeared.

"Holy Smoke!" cried Mike, as he joined the laughing twain, "did ye hear her? It is a sociable woman she is, and she 'll take charge of the

camp if our characters are sich as a lone widdy can approve. She wants a stove, curtains to the windy, a bed, and the cabin to herself, which av coorse is proper; and fifty dollars a week and her kape, a man to help pale the potatoes and do the chores, the respect due her sex, and 'Who 's that foine-looking man alongside of Rance?' — that's Tex she was maning — and 'Have ye seen go by on the trail a round-shouldered, bald-headed snipe with one tooth missing, a hangdog-looking feller that has lately desarted an affectionate wife?' " and Mike paused for breath, adding, "And if I ever do mate that man he has me pity, and it's a wurrd of sympathy he'll get. Tex, what is it about ye that attracts lonely wimmen? Sure, she has her eyes on ye, and I'm thinking it's many a chore you'll do for her if she stays wid us."

Tex grinned at the banter and declared himself proof against the wiles and fascinations of women. He was introduced to the lady later; and just before sundown Rance nudged Mike and called his attention to Tex wielding an axe, splitting firewood, and bringing water from the spring, Mrs. Ruth brightening his task by voluble and approving conversation. It may be

added that from that time forward he was her willing slave, and that Ruth assumed the attitude toward him of a mother hen to one chick.

She was really a treasure, a nervous, energetic little body who had Yankee cooking at her finger ends, from pie to pork and molasses, and the boarding-house became famed for the toothsome and substantial fare served to the men. This was no small advantage in the operation of the mine, as with comfortable quarters and bountiful appetizing food, a better class of labor could be secured and kept than if conditions had been different. In a couple of weeks operations were in full swing. A roomy boarding-house was completed, with private room attached for the occupancy of Mrs. Ruth, bunk-houses built to accommodate forty men, to which number the force had been increased, tools and supplies procured, and the camp settled down to an industrious and prosperous career. Its picturesqueness was somewhat added to by a company of Indians,—squaws, bucks, and papooses, a dozen in count, who, camping on the outskirts, managed to live from the refuse of the camp, supplemented by spasmodic hunting by the males, who were also suspected of sluice-robbing in outlying ra-

vines. Mrs. Ruth pressed into service a couple of the squaws, by their aid undertaking the week's washing for the camp, which not only included the ordinary woollen shirt for everyday wear, but a "biled" article for Sunday. By dividing the income from this source with her dusky aids, she managed to hold them to a spasmodic service, their only criticism on current affairs being, "Waugy woman, she heap talk."

The mine, the mainspring of all this activity, met and exceeded the partners' most sanguine anticipations. The working force was divided into day and night gangs of a dozen each; four men were employed in cutting and rolling timbers and poles to the mine; the mysteries of breasting and excavating the width of the channel solved; and the golden stream yielded up its treasure in a volume most satisfactory to the company. The daily clean-up averaged about a thousand dollars, and the total expense not over three hundred. Mike was in his glory as a boss and most popular in that role, for he was tactful, good-humored, and had a knack of getting the best out of his employees. He supervised the inside operations, looked after the clean-up, and exercised a general supervision; while

to Tex was allotted the care of operations during the night. The most vigilant attention to affairs was required, as the gold was coarse, the temptation to abstract a nugget almost irresistible; and despite the strictest precautions no doubt existed that a percentage of the finds did not reach the owners.

The widow had fairly fascinated the impressible Tex, and his afternoons were spent in her company. His Texas war and border adventures exorcised her garrulity and charmed her into an occasional silence; like Desdemona, she listened to his story and swore,

> "In faith, 't was strange, 't was passing strange,
> 'T was pitiful, 't was wondrous pitiful,"

as she lamented secretly that Heaven had not given her such a husband as this instead of the mean-spirited, meek absconder, whose only exhibition of independence had been to pluck up the courage to desert her and heartlessly leave her alone and unprotected in the midst of a lawless community.

Life in the camp dropped into a rut of continued prosperity, with no interruption to the idyllic conditions; in this hive of industry Rance was the only idler. It had been his intention,

when the winter's work was over and the several partners' interests in the results settled, to go to San Francisco for a prolonged and perhaps permanent stay. The absurdity of his occupation as cook, in contrast with the life he had led on the Mississippi plantation and at college, was so utterly at variance with his preconceived ideas of a career, that at times his soul revolted, and only by the exercise of a strong will had he been prevented from quitting the job and departing for the lowlands. However, he had reasoned that by holding on the spring would find him with a fair competence, enough at least to live like a gentleman until a more congenial avenue opened up; and it was this anticipation that had given him the requisite patience. Now, all this was changed. Ruth sniffed when he invaded her kitchen and refused to believe that he had been a success in the culinary department.

"Dear me, what messes you must have made, and how your partners must have suffered! It's a wonder to me you didn't poison 'em," commented the bustling little body. "You needn't tell me, I know you did not wash a dish nor scour a pot all winter. I had to soak 'em all in lye before they were fit to use. Men cooks! Men

ain't made to cook, nor ain't good for much else that I can see, except outdoor work. I despise to have 'em around."

To all of which Rance listened complacently, for he knew that despite the fact that it was ten o'clock and long past breakfast time, Ruth had kept the coffee warm, and that he would be provided with a cup of that beverage, hot and fragrant, together with a crisp biscuit, and a dissertation on his utter shiftlessness and inconsiderateness in interrupting the busy preparations for dinner.

"You are about as lazy and good-for-nothing as my Ithuriel Abner Sage, and goodness knows he didn't deserve to have as good a wife as I was to him. Why don't you take pattern after Mr. Texas, who works all night in that horrid wet tunnel? He don't come around at all hours, tracking up my kitchen."

CHAPTER X

RANCE MAKES SOME NEW FRIENDS

RANCE was polite enough to allow Mrs. Ruth liberty of speech, for notwithstanding her lecture she liked him and his ways and looked after his comfort as assiduously as if he was the most industrious bee in the hive, or rather as a privileged drone, exempt from toil. He could hardly explain to himself why he lingered, a mere looker-on in the busy camp, unless because he could idle and loaf without any compunction of conscience and enjoy the charm of the mountains. The absence of the trammels of civilization, the irresponsibility of it all, appealed to him. If he tired of The City of Six, he had but to saddle his horse and ride away over the ridge to any one of a half-dozen bustling, thriving mining towns, where many experiences were to be had, where life was keyed up to the highest pitch of excitement, where Fortune distributed her favors with lavish profusion, where the passions of men ran riot, and where, free from Puritanical prejudices

and galling conventionalities, humanity exulted in its freedom and celebrated its liberty in extravagancies of action that in later staid and sober times became traditions, the veracity of which is doubtfully admitted.

In this, Rance was more of an on-looker than participant. The rude amusements of the times did not appeal to him so much as the odd characters that he met; and in his wanderings he struck up a few friendships. Singularly, the most intimate for a time was with the man who was recognized as the boss gambler of the region. In the heterogeneous elements that were thrown together in the fifties, and in a society that in its standards upset all previously conceived ideas, the high-toned sporting man easily led all classes in commanding and receiving the homage of a majority of the community. This does not imply that all gamblers were respected; on the contrary, toleration described the attitude, for as a class they were outside the pale. There were the "bad men," the desperadoes, who in drunken frenzy proclaimed themselves as "chiefs" and ran amuck among their fellows, until the thrust of a knife or a well-aimed bullet laid them low. The slayers were seldom punished; it was usually

a case of self-defence; their loss was a gain, and so regarded outside their own circle. Hundreds of these characters flourished for a brief time, glorying in the unenviable reputation of killers of men, drunk with a bastard courage that must be publicly proclaimed with insistent repetition in order to sustain it, heroes among their kind for the coolness displayed in their bloody encounters, until they were gradually exterminated, or, the fallen fortunes of the camp diminishing the number of their admirers, emigrated to fresh fields east of the Sierras.

Then there were the crooked sports still lower down in the scale, those who conducted "brace" faro games, "rang in cold decks" in a poker game, cogged the dice, or tampered with the roulette wheel. While they reaped a big harvest, yet they were despised and outlawed, occupying about the same position in public estimation as the highwayman who robbed on the trails and squandered his plunder in the gaming-houses. Lowest of all were the riff-raff, the hangers-on, who managed to exist from the chance crumbs that fell in their way, appropriating others' bets, robbing drunken miners, and, when driven to it, stealing out into the night and under cover of the

darkness cleaning up the sluices in the creeks and gulches. They were execrated and detested, and, when caught, were in some cases hung, and in others publicly flogged and banished.

Yet as each camp had its "chief," so it had its leading professional, and no man stood higher than Rance's new-found friend. He associated on an equality with the judge, the lawyers, the merchant; he projected into his avocation cool judgment, mathematical calculation of the percentage in his favor, a rigid honesty in his business (a suspicion of unfairness would at once tumble him from his pedestal), nerve that never failed him on the most trying occasion, and a creed summed up tersely by his acquaintances, "His word is as good as a bond." That was his capital and his religion, for if by a chance run of bad luck his game went broke, the resources of the town were at his call, the banker and the merchant gladly extended the needed replenishment of coin and the game went on despite the vicissitudes of fortune. In truth, there was no risk, for in the long run the legitimate percentage in favor of the bank never failed to recoup temporary losses. In fact, there was no such thing as luck in the business so long as there were suffi-

cient funds to meet incidental fluctuations; it was only when the professionals grew reckless, and, tiring of the monotony of their legitimate pursuit, indulged in speculative forays against rival games that they came to pecuniary grief. They were distinguished by another characteristic, the neatness of their personal attire. In the fifties, black broadcloth was *de rigueur*—frock coat, low-cut vest, neat-fitting trousers, a tight high-heel boot, and a stiff hat of ample brim and crown. This latter was known as a "Peruvian sombrero," in color a terra-cotta shade, a ponderous, uncomfortable headgear affected by the gambler and the old-time stage-driver. They were immaculate also as to shirt front, which, with high old-fashioned collar and flowing black necktie, relieved somewhat the stiffness of the attire—"biled shirts," the miners ironically called them. In the Southern counties the polished bosoms were replaced by the elaborately ruffled shirt fronts and cuffs worn by the elderly, staid, and dignified Southerners. The latter were lovable old fellows who practised a little law, played a little "brag" (a Southern game that antedated and rivalled poker in the South, but is now obsolete and forgotten), ran for office, carried a

crooked-handled cane that could be hung on the arm when necessary, and drank deep and often. They were fierce politicians who glorified Calhoun and despised the Northern "mudsill," yet did not carry contempt so far as to refuse a casual invitation to drink extended by the hated Yankee. Poor old boys, they often degenerated into shabby barnacles and sank into paupers' graves.

Rance in his wanderings crossed the middle fork of the Yuba and climbed the steep trail that followed the bends of Bloody Run, arriving at Moore's Flat, a camp on the slope of the ridge. Here were gathered a couple of thousand men—miners, gamblers, Greasers, merchants, and publicans, Jew, Gentile, and aboriginal, a half-dozen females who were respectable, and a half-hundred who had no claim to that distinction. It was a motley mass of fortune-seekers, strung up to concert pitch by the fabulous yield of the recently discovered ancient channels in the vicinity, the majority toiling by day and roistering by night, gathering rich returns for their labor and throwing their gains to the winds—an eager, restless lot whose philosophy coincided with that of the Horatian creed: "To-morrow do thy worst, for I have lived to-day."

Lounging on the hotel porch one morning, looking up and down the one main straggling street, which was deserted except for a few loafers who loitered around the saloon doors, Rance noted a group of roughs busily engaged, as he supposed, petting a dog. He was quickly undeceived as to their kindly intentions when, loosing the poor cur, it came dashing down the street in an agony of terror, a fright caused by the attachment of a tin can to its tail. Scared into a frenzy by the rattling, bounding appendage, the animal ran along the thoroughfare, turned, dashed back again, and, utterly spent, took refuge under the steps leading up to the porch of the inn. Rance, who had watched the performance, viewed with disgust the loafers who had perpetrated it. Pitying the frightened beast, he at once went to its rescue and, with difficulty coaxing it from its hiding-place, he whipped out his pocket-knife and cut away the rope. He had barely completed his charitable action when half a dozen of the fellows drew near, one of them demanding what he meant by interfering with their pastime, at the same time attempting to seize the frightened dog. Rance's temper was up, and oblivious of any risk, he warned them to

keep their hands off, at the same time using some vigorous and forcible language in denouncing their so-called sport. There was every chance for a nasty row, as numbers gave them courage; and with ugly demeanor and characteristic clutch of pistol hand to side pocket they were on the brink of precipitating an attack, hesitating for a moment as Rance drew his six-shooter, when a commanding voice sang out: "Vamos, you dirty loafers!" They seemed to recognize the authority of the speaker, for with one accord they slunk away to their retreats, leaving Rance and the dog to their own devices. Rance turned to see who had wrought this sudden change in the intentions of his assailants and noted, leaning lazily against an upholding post of the porch, a man some thirty-odd years of age, a tall, well-knit figure clad in the conventional black affected by the devotees of fortune—evidently one of those gentlemen of leisure who, ostensibly conducting games of chance, were really exponents of certainties, in short, a faro banker, and as it happened, the leading one of the region roundabout. There was a look out of a pair of gray eyes that seemed capable of gazing at the sun without wavering, a square-set chin, and a face

pallid, almost bloodless and emotionless. The pallor was due doubtless to the long night sessions in the crowded gaming-house, the sunless, ill-ventilated precincts of which were not calculated to tinge the cheek of its *habitué* with healthful color. Looking lazily at the retreating crowd and then glancing at Rance, he said,

"I beg your pardon for interfering. The chances are the coyotes would not have jumped you, but they might; I hope you will not take it as discourteous."

"They not only might, but they surely would," retorted Rance, "but I could not stand by and see a poor dog persecuted."

He smiled at the stranger and then at the animal, which with that intuition that is given to dogs, recognized in his rescuer a friend, and with violent wagging of tail and contortions of body was doing his best to demonstrate that he understood and was thankful for the obligations he had been placed under. He was not a bad-looking dog by any means, evidently a stray from some other camp, abashed by his unfriendly reception and only wanting a pat on the head and a kind word to restore his self-esteem, and ready to attach himself to Rance at an encouraging word.

"Risk or no risk, it was the act of a good fellow and I would like to shake hands with you; I 'm Phillips, Brant Phillips," with a barely perceptible smile extending his hand.

Rance took the offered member, white and delicate, but the grasp proved to be a nervous, powerful clasp that made Rance's fingers tingle. The two men looked in each other's eyes, glances that measured the depths, and were at once in accord.

"I might ask you in to take a drink," said Phillips, "but really I am the only temperance man in the town. Drinking interferes with my business, but I can offer you a good cigar," drawing a case from his pocket and proffering an imported weed, which Rance accepted.

Drawing together two armchairs, they sat them down, the dog between, and were soon deep in mutual confidences; or rather, the impulsive Rance told of his wanderings, adventures, and fortunes, his companion, with occasional comment lending a sympathetic ear. When Rance alluded to his determination at one time to become a professional card-player and his turning cook instead, Phillips congratulated him on his choice.

"Don't do it," he commented; "I suppose I am the loneliest man on the ridge, forced to associate with a lot of hounds who are only fit to people hell, or foolish miners who have not got sense enough to know they have no chance against the game; ostracized justly by the decent element, and degraded by the company of the rest. If I did not know that I would abandon it after a while, and that I follow it because to me it is the shortest road to independence, I would walk down into the ravine and put a bullet through my heart."

Rance wondered at the vehemence and bitterness of his companion's remarks, and dropping the subject, wandered into more congenial topics. Supping together, a meal in which the dog was a bountiful participant, they parted with a promise of another meeting, and Rance saddled his horse and took the trail for home, the moon lighting up the path and the forest — a lonely ride, but not alone. The grateful dog had found his master, and The City of Six became his abiding-place.

CHAPTER XI

MIKE IS A MODEL MINE-MANAGER

MIKE, who, except by Rance and Tex, was called Mr. Donovan, had by his energy transformed the plateau at the head of Slug Canyon into a model mining camp. Work was carried on inside the mine in a systematic way as he became more familiar with the requirements; the science of timbering, capping, and breasting, and the necessity of taking out six or eight feet thick and a hundred feet wide of pay gravel, became less and less a problem. In a stretch of fifteen miles, from The City of Six on the north to Orleans Flat on the south, the channel of the old dead river had been traced and opened where the canyons, creeks, and river had cut through and below its old bed. At Forest City, Chipp's Flat, Alleghany, Minnesota, and Moore's Flat, busy and prosperous camps had sprung up, dozens of companies were delving in the old river bed, and the returns were enormous. Intelligent and inventive brains directed opera-

tions, and an interchange of experience gave all the benefit of the knowledge acquired.

Mike was in his element, carrying the responsibility of manager and performing the duties devolving upon him with an adaptability that was at once a surprise and gratification to his associates. Those who in after years recalled the masterly way in which he handled the company's property and affairs saw in it the budding of a career that a decade or so later made him the foremost mine-manager in the world, a man with a grasp of affairs, an intuition as to probabilities and values, that rewarded him in the end with wealth almost beyond the dream of avarice. In his old age — and he was generous, big-hearted Mike to the last — he was fond of recurring to The City of Six and its memories and insisting that in the light of the meagre knowledge existing at that time, the problems were more formidable, the apparent obstacles more serious to overcome, and the conquering of them more of an achievement, than when later he bore on his shoulders the burden of the development and operation of the greatest mine and lode the world had ever seen. And he would add with a sigh, that those were the happy days, when it began to dawn upon

him that wealth was power, and when riches had not become a burden.

Not so with Tex; ambition did not stir nor greed oppress him. To be sure he was rapidly becoming a rich man, and he sometimes wondered what he would do with all his money. Mining of itself had little attraction for him, and if he had any day-dreams it was the conjuring up of visions of the grassy plains of Texas, with herds of cattle grazing over a vast area and himself as the lazy lord and proprietor of the range. The vision was too intangible to take definite shape in his brain, and a sharp word from Ruth recalled him to realities. Insensibly that energetic little woman dominated Tex and his affairs without remonstrance from him. He had no inclination to protest, as it was a most novel and agreeable situation. Women had played but small part in his life, and good women none. In the border days, down on the Rio Grande, and afterward with the army in Mexico, a brown face and a pair of flashing black eyes had stirred his passion; but in those strenuous times he had not lingered long enough to form any serious attachment, and in California the absence of the sex had not been a deprivation; but Ruth was a revelation, a dif-

ferent species from what he had previously met. Her sharp tongue stirred his mental processes; her fluent speech, even when going over a category of his deficiencies, was not unpleasant, nor did he resent her *quasi* assumption of authority over him.

"Sakes, you are the most shiftless man I ever met," she exhorted, "loafing around here on the Lord's Day in your weekday duds, and a white shirt ready to put on. I'm not going to work my fingers to the bone, washing and ironing, sending for starch clear to Sacramento, and you and the rest of 'em too lazy to spruce up and look decent."

"Who wants to put on a biled shirt?" retorted Tex, hastening to add apologetically, "Of course, Mrs. Ruth, I don't mind, but the men are growling and swearing that they don't hire out to dress like gamblers of a Sunday."

"Better look like gamblers than pigs," she snorted. "Mercy, where did they come from, and what sort of a bringing up did they have? Of course, it's none of my business, and Mr. Donovan is a little uppish because I try to have the camp decent; well, if you don't like it get another boarding-house keeper — I'm sure, if I can't

have proper respect shown me, I don't want to stay."

"Dern it all," replied Tex, to whose mind came an unusual pang at the thought of Ruth's possible leaving, "we'll wear biled shirts to sleep in, if that will please you; but you want to look out for that box of starch,—if the men find out where you keep it, it will disappear," and he chuckled as he recalled incipient plots that had for their object the abstraction and destruction of that despised accessory to torture.

Ruth had as little intention of going away as Mike of dispensing with her services. She was invaluable in her department; and while some of the more sensitive winced at her cutting remarks and entertained rebellious thoughts, after all there was no table so bountifully supplied with appetizing and daintily cooked food in all that region roundabout, and the appeal to their stomachs was persuasive and irresistible.

Her liking and open preference for Tex was too plainly indicated to be ignored, although there was no breath of scandal in it.

"I wonder how she is going to fix it; she'll sure get a divorce, and Tex is the widow's meat," commented one of the boarders.

"Well, why not?" replied another. "If I had a wife who could cook like the widow, she could nag from hell to breakfast; I'd stand for it if for nothing else than them doughnuts and pudding wot she gives us for Sunday dinner."

"Yes, her grub is a set-off, for a fact; but her hubby could n't stand it — he skipped."

This mild sort of gossip, even if it came to their ears, did not disturb Ruth or Tex. Truth was they had come to an understanding. The widow was to ask for a legal separation at the next term of court — there was no doubt of its being granted, — and in the fall they would join hands and fortunes. Tex, like Barkis, was willing and happy in the prospect, and left the matter entirely with Ruth.

It may be added that in after years, when the cattle ranch from a dream became a reality, although the Coast Range was its location instead of the Lone Star State, Tex never regretted having been led into captivity by the little widow, nor did he resent her oft-iterated statement that she had made a man of him. If the domestic atmosphere became clouded and Ruth fretted and fumed over his shortcomings, there was a stout

mustang to ride, a thousand cattle to look after, and a dash over the ranch dispelled any little annoyance arising from his wife's ill temper,—"The little woman does n't mean anything, it 's just her nature."

CHAPTER XII

RANCE'S GAMBLING FRIEND VISITS THE CAMP

WHEN Rance returned with his newly acquired follower, the rescued dog, he found awaiting him a letter from Wakefield, which brought the information of the latter's intention of returning to California before the close of the summer. He had found his wife in failing health, afflicted with a pulmonary trouble, and the physicians had advised her that a journey to a milder climate was the only hope of a cure. The daughter, he wrote, had grown to be almost a young woman, had graduated from the village academy, and was wild over the prospect of a trip to the Far West. It was fable land to the slow-witted plodders of her birthplace, and her girl associates feigned a pity that was nearer envy, that she should be condemned to exile in a barbarous, and, if the tales told were true, monstrously uncivilized and irreligious land. Wakefield requested that a suitable shelter be provided for his little family, as he was convinced that the pure mountain air and the healing winds through

the pines were the medicine his helpmeet needed, and he appealed to his comrade to make it as comfortable as possible.

Here was a congenial occupation for Rance, and with the hearty co-operation of Mike and Tex, he at once set about building a nest. Ruth sniffed over this prospective invasion by an invalid, and declared that she would not wait on her; then she belied her words by feminine suggestions of indispensable furnishings of a variety and kind that had not occurred to the untutored minds of her male friends.

In the prosperity of the camp, Ruth had become more of a directress than a worker. A wandering Chinaman, tired of the rude buffetings and inhospitable treatment of white men, had become her chief aid, and was by her initiated into the mysteries of the culinary art.

"She belly good woman, she talkee, talkee, talkee, allee same to me," commented Tong. "She no letee Melican man foolee, me get hundled dollah month; bime-by allee same cook like Missy Luth, get two hundled dollah, suppose all time talkee me stay."

The squaws had also found life fairly attractive at the camp, and although they had a discon-

certing way of wandering off when Ruth became too strenuous in her role, the bucks, who preferred the crumbs and leavings of the boarding-house to an acorn diet, rounded them up and drove them back to their tasks. "Lo the poor Indian" was too lazy or too proud to lend a hand, although finding it most congenial to live upon the increment of his squaw's labors, and he was inclined to strictly enforce a domestic discipline that provided a substitute for the hitherto necessary annual grasshopper and pine-nut harvest.

A site for the house was selected in a secluded portion of the plateau away from the mine and the cluster of habitations around it, a nook close under the ridge and in the midst of a group of lofty pines. Much more care was bestowed on the structure than had been given to the construction of the other cabins. The logs of which it was built were squared and jointed; a real board floor was laid from planks packed with infinite trouble and difficulty from a sawmill a dozen miles away; double sash windows and panelled doors, hitherto unknown outside of the county town, added a touch of elegance and modernity; and the camp carpenter exhausted his skill and

invention in handy shelves and closets, the latter by direct intervention of Ruth, who declared that one of her most acute trials had been the lack of this necessary provision for comfort in the rude dwellings in which she had been forced to abide. The house completed, there came the furnishing, and here Ruth was again indispensable. After many long and serious consultations, she was finally despatched to Sacramento with a *carte blanche* to buy and forward by mule team a long list of furniture and furnishings, an errand that she accomplished with celerity and excellent judgment. These were in due time delivered at the terminus of the wagon road, some ten miles distant down the ridge, and from that point packed in by mule train and safely housed. When finished, it was really a most comfortable and attractive dwelling. Ruth added the ultimate touches in the way of upholstery and adornment, such as snow-white counterpane and ruffled pillowcases on the bed, a cushion in the one rocking-chair thoughtfully provided for the invalid, and a doormat which she insisted should be used before the slovenly and careless male was granted admittance. Mike pronounced it fit for an Irish king, and even Rance was impressed by the un-

wonted luxury and felt that in his mode of living he was sacrificing to his pagan love of nature's beauties the real comforts of life.

Perhaps it was this sense of loss that, when there came another letter from Wakefield announcing the exact date of his departure, it not only reconciled but made him eager for a journey to San Francisco to meet and welcome back his partner and family; and while a month would elapse before their arrival he felt that meanwhile he deserved and could enjoy the distractions and dissipations of a visit to the city.

Incidentally, during the time occupied in the building of the new house, he had ridden over to Moore's Flat, renewed his acquaintance with his sporting friend, and induced that busy man to abandon for a day or more his avocation (there were trusted lieutenants who could be depended upon for carrying on the games) and accept the hospitalities of The City of Six. Brant enjoyed more than he cared to tell this surcease from his predatory occupation. Here was a spot where the dissipated miner, the camp loafer, and the unsexed women were not, an ideal retreat from which was absent the glaring vulgarity and

flaunting barbarism of the ridge towns, a little community that was singular in its orderliness.

Mike, who was an absolute dictator in his realm, had resisted an invasion of the whiskey-seller and the followers in his wake, had discouraged and weeded out the drunken and improvident worker, and by reason of high wages and good fare had gathered around him a superior force of temperate men. They were by no means saints, but they were above the average, and after a time came to have an honest pride in their little hamlet, a pride that when the restraints became a trifle irksome and they sought relaxation and yielded to temptation when visiting near-by camps, led them to boasting of the superiority of their abiding-place. This so jarred on the feelings of their neighbors that the visitors were often compelled to uphold their vauntings by force of arms, and many a rough and tumble encounter resulted. It, however, was the proper local pride as well as the taste of a strenuous pleasure denied them in their own community.

Rance as host exhausted the resources of the place in entertaining his guest, and Ruth outdid herself in seconding his efforts. This stranger

appealed to her forcibly. Here was a man who wore a "biled shirt" and did not murmur at what the rest regarded as a stiff and starched horror, a yoke of misery and discomfort; a person whose neat apparel was unwrinkled, who shaved daily and flecked the dust from polished boots to preserve their tidiness, and even wiped his feet voluntarily on the doormat. Careless Tex was so exhorted to take pattern after this immaculate example that the preaching became a weariness to his soul.

Rance and Brant became fairly friendly. It was possibly the attractiveness of the unlike that linked them in friendship. Brant was the elder by several years, reserved, taciturn, and not given to companionship or confidences; on the contrary, Rance wore his heart on his sleeve and to a friend confided his hopes, disappointments, ambitions, and failures freely and without much reserve. Brant was cold, calculating, and of a manner and carriage that invited no intimacies. In his profession he walked apart from his fellows, disdained their comradeship, despised their vices, and stood aloof from the shady side of their lives.

"There runs ice water in his veins," was the

current comment on his attitude, and to some extent the criticism was just, so far as the exterior he presented to the undiscriminating. After all, it was a mask cleverly worn, deliberately assumed and used as a valuable asset. He was a Marylander by birth, the scion of a prominent family which at one time had owned broad and fair acres, although when Brant became of age the sheriff had transferred the title to aliens and his patrimony dwindled to nothing. His father had, in old Washington society of "before the war," dissipated his lands and fortune in an instinctive and uncontrollable passion for gambling; and on the race course, in the social games of the Southern element, and at the fascinating faro banks had seen his last dollar disappear. Then, rather than become a hanger-on, he wisely ended his career by a bullet through his brain, leaving Brant, his only child, to make his own way as best he might. Luckily, he had given the boy the advantage of tutor and college. If Brant inherited the taint and the gambling passion was in his blood, he had no means of gratifying it, as he was penniless; and the disgrace of his father's taking off and his known impecunious condition alienated his few friends. Ostracized

and desperate he deliberately resolved to adopt the career that had proved his father's ruin, with the difference that he would prey instead of being preyed upon. He studied closely all games of chance, the mathematical odds in favor of the bank, the invariable law of percentages to count on, and in social games he practised that close observation of human nature that notes and takes advantage of temperamental betrayal of emotions. The study became so absorbing and so successful that from the subordinate place of dealer he had in a few years become a capitalist and proprietor. In the pursuit he had had the satisfaction of plucking many of those who had fleeced his father, but his pride was hurt. As a gentleman's son he had held his head as high as the best; as a professional gambler he was an outcast, and although showing no outward signs, he suffered deeply in spirit.

It was this feeling that impelled him, when the discovery of gold in California opened a new field, to desert his old haunts and with ample capital start anew in a country where people were too busy or too indifferent to bother themselves about his past. Deep in his breast he had cherished the plan of at some future day redeem-

ing the old acres from strangers' hands, and in his own right taking the place among the gentry that his father's weakness had deprived him of. He had prospered beyond his most sanguine hopes, was rich as riches counted in that era, although at a cost. His contact with the baser sort had bred in him a contempt for humanity, he doubted the existence of good men, and the existence of good women had faded from his memory. Rance's intervention in favor of the persecuted dog was the first decent action that had come under his observation for years; its disinterestedness, when it meant peril to the intervener, forced admiration; and when in the ensuing lounge on the porch of the hotel Rance confidingly laid bare his history, his heart yearned for such a friend. By birth and education they were equal. Rance confessed how near, when deserted by his slaves, he had come to adopting a like career; this and the strength of character that had enabled him to brave ridicule in his occupation as cook appealed to the cynic and led him to welcome the tentative advances of his would-be comrade. In fact, as the companionship grew closer, he felt that Rance was on a plane above him. There was dignity in his

position as mine-owner and stockholder in a prosperons corporation, the abundant riches in which he shared came from the earth, its accumulation did no man wrong, and while Brant rejoiced in his friend's prosperity, he envied its source and grew more and more dissatisfied with his own position and associations.

Charmed with the unwonted quiet and peacefulness of the retreat, in such marked contrast with the turmoil of its neighbors, Brant lingered day after day neglectful of his interests and content to pay any price for the relaxation. Even Ruth, who as a rule set the nerves of most men on edge, had a fascination for him, and he was surprised to find himself in a strangely sentimental mood when he was told of the budding romance in which Tex was the hero and she the heroine. He had lived so long in a sordid half-world that this phase came as a revelation. He gave eager attention to the brief and unexciting history of the camp, thrilled over the recital of the discovery of the big nugget, sympathized with Wakefield's awakened literary instincts and his absorption in Shakespearean dramas, gave a rapt ear to the tales of the border as retold by Tex, and above all, paid homage to the ruling

spirit of the place, the masterful Mike, whom he recognized as a man among men.

"Upon my word, I would not have believed it," he finally confided to Rance "Here's a place where the gin-mill and the Jew store are not, where every one is working for a living and contented in his work, and," — a puzzled expression spread over his face — "when I dropped into the bunk-house after supper last night, a dozen men were playing cards — seven-up and euchre, — and it sort of relieved me to know that there was one vice to leaven all this virtue. But when I asked what were the stakes, as I 'm a sinner they told me there were none; they were playing for the fun of it, keeping a nightly account of games won and lost, merely to decide who were the luckiest or more skilled. I must get out of this; it is beginning to undermine my principles."

"It's all Mike and his example," replied Rance; "you wouldn't believe, to watch him, that a year ago he was an irresponsible devil-may-care Irishman, who revelled in a drunken debauch and was happiest when squandering his money in a riotous spree. He had, however, a level head and a will-power that, once resolved,

wrought a complete transformation, and now he is the mainspring of the whole place."

Brant pondered over the situation and took deep counsel with himself. A first result of his meditations was an intimation to Rance that if it would be agreeable he would accompany his friend to San Francisco; that is, if Rance would postpone his departure for a couple of days, a sufficient delay that would allow him to put his affairs in such shape as to permit his absence. Rance cheerfully consented and at the expiration of the time was joined by Brant, and the two, well mounted and equipped, rode off down the ridge bearing a welcoming message to Wakefield and his family and a unanimously expressed wish for their own speedy return. There was one dissenting voice, and it was loudly raised in protest. The dog, who gave a devoted and unselfish allegiance to Rance, and who since his rescue had been a constant attendant and loyal slave of his adopted master, tugged at the end of a rope that deprived him of liberty, in an agony of anxiety and fear, persuaded that he was being abandoned by a loved friend; the echo of his wailing expostulations was the last sound they heard as they rode down the trail.

CHAPTER XIII

WAKEFIELD AND HIS FAMILY ARRIVE

IT is hardly worth while following the adventures of the twain on their journey, or during their sojourn in the city. Rance, who had dreamed of and projected this visit for months, plunged into the distractions of the town with a joyous abandon; but at the end of a couple of weeks it began to pall on him. Everything was at too high pressure. Under the stimulus of the stream of gold that was poured into the city it seethed with excitement. Steamers were departing with those to whom fortune had come, and steamers arriving with eager adventurers from all lands, a hurly-burly of humanity of all classes and all degrees, a jostling tide that ebbed and flowed, inspired by the lust for easily acquired riches. In this multitude, moved only to the attainment of its own selfish interests, the amenities of ordinary life disappeared, or if practised, were hidden from view. There were good men and a few good women, the beginnings of home life and happy households, but to the

casual observer they were not in evidence. Rogues in office plundered the city at will and almost without protest; the scum of all nations found a harbor of refuge and ran riot in their evil ways. Legitimate business was a gamble, and gambling a legitimate pursuit; commodities that brought fabulous prices for the day and returned a thousand or more per cent profit, were on the morrow drugs on the market. There was no stable foundation to the mercantile structure. Over-receipts tumbled down prices; frequent fires swept away stocks; fortunes melted, and withal there was no confidence in the permanence of the place. Few had any faith in the future, and this instability and doubt nerved all to strain every effort to get rich quick and depart. It was not strange under the conditions that the gambling spirit possessed the majority, and this was stimulated by the one tangible fact — the flux and reflux of individual fortunes had no bearing on or connection with the cause of it all, the outpouring of the precious metal from the foothill placers. There was no abatement to the yield, and from a thousand sources it found its way to the treasure vaults of the metropolis.

For a time the conditions interested Rance, and he was pleased and content to swim with the current. Shortly, however, he realized that he was no part of it and doubted whether he had any desire to be. The gentlemanly and dignified leisure that seemed to him to be most desirable would put one out of touch with the situation. A constitutional idler was not in place in this busy hive. To be sure, there was a clique of Southern gentlemen who made headquarters at the hotel where he and Brant stopped, a chivalrous lot who disdained commercial pursuits, looked to a benign and sympathetic federal administration to provide them with fat berths, and claimed an inherent right to all the offices. Rance, when it became known that he was of the elect, was warmly welcomed to the circle, more heartily, perhaps, when it was also understood that he had no ambition to feed on the bounty of the Government and was in easy circumstances.

"Met your father at the St. Charles in New Orleans," confided one of these old parasites, "and he was a gentleman, suh, whom I was proud to know. Ah, it was young blood then, and I fear we were a little gay; our purses were at

each other's service, suh," and he glanced at Rance to note whether his old friend's son was of the same metal.

It usually ended in a trifling loan, "a debt of honah, suh," to be paid when salary day came around. He was also welcomed to the private poker game, a privilege to which no mere plebeian dare aspire; but here he held his own, and the Judge, whose temporary embarrassment he had relieved, was pleased to admit that the boy handled the "keerds" so skilfully as to do credit to his bringing up.

During this time his comrade had participated with him in the current diversions, although in a perfunctory way. His principal occupation had been in looking over inviting investments; some were safe, and others — which included the purchase of city real estate — were, owing to the difference of opinion as to its future, classed as hazardous and uncertain. If when the gold production was over there should remain no longer any justification for the building up of a Pacific Coast metropolis, and the country should return to its old pastoral state, then the investment would prove to be a poor one; if, on the other hand, as the more sanguine predicted, the gold

discovery was but the beginning of development, and in due time a great empire should replace the old conditions, then the investor would reap a thousand fold; and Brant was gambler enough to take what was considered the odds. This concluded, time hung heavy on his hands; he was anxious to get back to the mountains, for he had planned and secretly determined upon a radical departure, one which meant a complete change in his mode of living, — pursuits which would ring down the curtain so far as cards or games were concerned and yet not eliminate the element of chance. In fine, his visit to The City of Six had persuaded him that in mining the risks were no greater, the returns much larger; and he had resolved to employ some of his capital in that direction.

For this reason he was more than pleased when Rance one day intimated that city life had lost its charm and expressed a wish that the Panama steamer would arrive, and a return to the Sierras be no longer delayed. Rance had arranged for suitable quarters at the hotel for the expected ones, and they both eagerly and impatiently watched the semaphore on Telegraph Hill, which heralded the announcement of the boat's

appearance off the bar. When at last the welcome signal was displayed, Rance urged the carriage driver to hasten down the sandy road to the wharf. Here he paced up and down for three hours before the boat made its tardy approach and docked, not heeding the fact that hacks were in great demand on these occasions and that he would be mulcted at the rate of ten dollars per hour for the time consumed. A thousand eager faces lined the rails, a throng curious to catch a glimpse of El Dorado; and in the rush for shore a half-hour elapsed before he could gain the deck. At last he recognized Wakefield among the waiting mass and made his way to his partner's side. There was a warm greeting, hasty inquiries as to the health and welfare of his absent comrades, and then they made their way to the cabin where the wife and daughter were waiting.

It is a subconscious habit — the construction of mental photographs of people talked about whom we have not met and scenes described but yet unvisited. During the long winter evenings on the mountain Wakefield had dwelt lovingly on the personality of his wife and little girl, and Rance had been a sympathetic listener. In his mind he

had framed a picture of the twain which, taking form and color from the rustic environment, evoked a type of country beauty, the maturity of a blooming, buxom village belle, growing fat and frowzy with advancing years. The invalidism of the wife had mentally changed and modified this creation into a querulous sick woman, the victim of a harsh and depressing climate. This for the wife; as for the daughter, he anticipated meeting a round-faced, red-cheeked, efflorescent hobbledehoy at the awkward age that intervenes between the child and the woman, lacking repose or refinement, except perhaps a shyness bred of her unaccustomed contact with the great world.

There was no justification for this prejudgment beyond the unconscious impressions drawn from Wakefield's references to his life in the States and the natural mate that would be the choice of a man of his robust physique and mental limitations. It was but natural that a Hebe would appeal to him in preference to a Psyche, his ideal would be material rather than spiritual; at least thus reasoned Rance if he gave any thought to the subject. Then, he was prejudiced to a degree and touched with the inherited con-

tempt of the South for anything north of Mason and Dixon's Line; although his experience and associations since he had departed from his Southern home had taught him that his views had been essentially narrow and false and he had modified his opinions relative to those outside the sacred lines of chivalry.

Judge of his surprise when, descending with Wakefield to the cabin, he encountered one who in no way resembled his forecast. Instead, he was greeted by a woman neither pronounced, embarrassed, nor shy. Instead of the rusticity and *gaucherie* that he had anticipated, she met him with the quiet bearing and aplomb of a well bred and well poised woman of the world and yet with a sincere cordiality and frank pleasure that impressed him most favorably. A rather slight but well moulded figure, features refined and regular, face a little pale and drawn, indicating the invalid and sufferer, an abundance of wavy brown hair and a pair of brown eyes beaming with welcome,—that was the vision that banished Rance's preconceived picture.

"Oh, Mr. Poole," she exclaimed, "what a pleasure it is to meet you! You seem one of my closest friends. My husband has told me so much

of your kindness and your companionship, both in his letters and after he returned. I have heard so much of you and Mike and Tex and the wonderful 'City of Six' and its beginnings, that it seems as if I were as closely linked to its fortunes and those of its founders as if I were a part of it."

"I trust he did not refer to me as 'Mr. Poole,'" laughingly retorted Rance. "That would not fit the traditions of the camp nor my part in it. He could not well conceal from you my humble occupation. You must know that I was the cook and that in my lack of previous training I had many shortcomings to answer for."

"Oh, no! it was never 'Mr.,' but just 'Rance,' although you could not expect me to take that liberty at the first meeting. As for the cooking, no French chef could receive higher encomiums. That was but a small part of his enthusiasm,—it was his good friend and loyal comrade that was uppermost in his thoughts," and wonderfully expressive eyes met Rance's in a caressing glance that spoke the affection and gratitude that her husband's report had inspired.

"But, gracious! I am forgetting Dot. Our daughter, Dorothea, Mr. Poole."

Again Rance went off his mental balance. A tall, handsome girl, neither awkward nor embarrassed, extended her hand as frankly as had her mother, whom she resembled in nothing except the heritage of the eyes, which impressed him as the loveliest pair he ever looked into.

"I am sure you will permit me to call you 'Rance,'" said the young girl. "It would dispel all my illusions if I had to re-create you as 'Mr.'; besides, I am only a child, and father will not admit even that,—he looks on me as an overgrown baby."

Rance protested that the prefix was entirely out of the question and that he would be delighted to at once establish that *quasi* intimacy that the familiar use of his first name would imply.

"But come, let us leave the steamer; I am sure the change to land will be an agreeable one after what has doubtless been a fatiguing and tiresome trip," and he led the way ashore, where the patient hackman was waiting. Subsidizing a porter to take care of the baggage, they were soon at the hotel, where the travellers were comfortably installed; Brant, who was awaiting them, having first been formally introduced.

"Rance, it seems to me that you were a long way off in your ideas of the appearance of your friends," began Brant, whose observation of the ladies, though brief, had served to give him an entirely different impression than what he had expected from Rance's prejudgment. "They may be country born and country bred, but it strikes me they are also well bred, and they are certainly well mannered. The mother is quite interesting with her refined air, and the daughter is a stunning girl. Did you note the hair and the eyes — they both have them — and the long eyelashes that shade them? The combination is fetching. Of course, rustic speech and village manners may offset it."

"No, no," replied Rance, "their speech is as free from vulgarism as their air from rusticity. I confess I am surprised, for Wakefield, while one of the best fellows alive, is not polished — more of a rough diamond — yet he is shrewd and capable. I must have put too low an estimate on the advantages of country towns in the North in the way of society and culture."

"Speaking of Wakefield, what do you think of his greeting to me? Is the Bard of Avon the text-book in the village schools, and mouthing

Shakespeare the common custom? I am not very well pleased by the role he has given me—'Honest Iago, let it not gall your patience that I extend my manners. 'T is my breeding that gives me a bold show of courtesy.' That is what he flung at me; and faith, I'll not play Iago to his Othello."

"It's queer," said Rance, "there is a change in the man from what he was before he went away. At times he is the old Dean, as we nicknamed him, eager to know of the happenings during his absence, looking forward to meeting his partners, interested in the fortunes of the corporation in which his own are included, solicitous and anxious as to whether the wife and girl will be contented in the foothills, and then a dreamy look comes into his eyes and he is up in the clouds. In the hack he asked me if the Forest of Arden was as pleasant as of yore, and, 'Are not those woods more free from peril than the envious court?' I could only stare at him until he came down to earth again, which he did when the daughter cried, 'Oh! bother the Forest of Arden, papa; wait until we get there, and if it is, I will play Rosalind to some Orlando.'"

"She'll play the deuce up there in exile,"

said Brant, "it's a shame to banish her mother and herself to so rough a place. I trust that old fellow will give me some other part than that of the treacherous Venetian."

The party soon recovered from the fatigue of the voyage and did not seem to feel that the mountains meant exile; on the contrary, they were anxious to leave for their new home. Rance told them of the preparations that had been made for their reception and comfort; of Ruth, her peculiarities, her share in it, and her budding romance; of the famous output of the mine; of Brant and of the dog to whom he owed the acquaintance, omitting allusion to Brant's profession, feeling that the knowledge might prejudice them against him.

At the end of the week they took the river steamer for Sacramento, and while sailing up the placid bay the wife sought out Rance and asked for a confidential interview.

"I must confide in you and ask your help," she began. "I have no one else to turn to in my trouble. Surely you must see some change in my husband; is he the same as when he departed from California?"

"No," answered Rance, "he is not my old

pard; that is, not all the time; he falls into moody spells and then without rhyme or reason, lugs in a quotation, more or less to the point. He was not given to that before he went away."

"That is it, and how strange it is!" she continued. "Before he left me, a saner or more simple man never lived. Books had little interest for him, and poets less. He was always cheerful, good-humored, and interested only in the daily humdrum affairs of life; now he falls into spells and will moon around by the hour, silent, distracted, taking no note of us or his surroundings, muttering and quoting from the plays. Then he will come to himself and, strangely enough, seems to have no recollection of his trance, and"—the tears welling up to her eyes—"then he is again my old Dick."

Clasping her hands she looked imploringly at Rance as if he had the power to ward off the spell. "Do you think his brain affected?"

Suddenly there came to Rance the memory of those long winter nights in the cabin and the particular one on which he had read the bantering speech of Jessica and Lorenzo. Had he unwittingly set in motion some kink in Wakefield's brain, some hitherto dormant faculty that

needed but the poet's words to fire his imagination? He recalled how from that time his partner had become an absorbed student, and that Shakespeare's characters had walked the boards, or rather, the dirt floor of the room, at times to his amusement, at others to his utter boredom. Now he could see that it had developed into a mania, "that grew fat from what it fed upon," and that Wakefield was living a dual life, that his imagination was creating a world and peopling it with shadows; and Rance grew grave as he grasped the situation. He could only reply that while there was a change, the chances were it was but a temporary one, and that she could calm her fears in the trust that if he was a trifle unbalanced the tonic of the woods, the meeting with his old partners, and the resumption of his mining life would turn his mind back into sane channels. It was the sole sympathy and encouragement he could offer, and the cheering manner in which he conveyed his hope somewhat allayed her fears.

The journey by boat, stage, and finally in the saddle, took the better part of a week. Arriving at Nigger Tent, where the grade started down the mountain to the river and the ridge

trail began, they met Tex, who had been deputed to await them and act as escort to the camp. From Sacramento it had not been a very pleasant trip. The fierce rays of a July sun beat down on the brown hills, the heat was intense, and the stage, plunging along over winding roads, was enveloped in a cloud of red dust stirred up by the hoof-beats of the horses. The only relief from the monotony of the ride was when a turnout was made to pass the big freight wagons with their string of eight, nine, or ten span of mules, crawling along at a snail's pace, painfully and laboriously hauling the huge cargo to some faraway mining town, spurred to increased effort by the crack of the blacksnake and a volley of picturesque exhortation from the "mule skinner," the expressive nickname given to the early-day teamster. Under the depressing effect of the heat the weary party ceased to note even these incidents, and when they disembarked at the Tent, the women felt themselves almost incapable of further exertion.

"And this is the paradise to which you have insisted we were going," sarcastically remarked Mrs. Wakefield. "Really, it does not meet my

When a turnout was made g freight wagons with their

ideas of that Elysium. On the contrary, it seems as if it were the direct opposite."

"Oh," laughed Rance, "you are only at the gates of paradise; it is about ten miles up the ridge and we call it 'The City of Six.' "

"It's all an illusion," interrupted Dot, "and here's the proof. This you say is 'Nigger Tent,' and there is no tent, no niggers; we are chasing phantoms, and 'cities' and 'sixes' will turn out as unsubstantial as a mirage, or something so entirely different as to be a contradiction to our expectations."

" 'I am a feather for each wind that blows; sons, we will higher to the mountains and there secure us,' " Wakefield quoted.

It was a jarring note, this inapt quotation. While silent and *distrait,* so far on the journey he had been his saner self, and his relapse dampened their spirits. No notice was taken of it; an understanding had been established among the party that they should ignore what they hoped was only an eccentricity.

A wash in the cold water of a near-by spring served to rid them of a portion of the stains of travel, a luncheon further revived them, and as

the lengthening shadows marked the sinking of the sun and tempered the fierce heat, they took the trail for their goal.

It was a refreshing change from the tiresome stage ride. The path led along the crest of the spur through anzanita thickets of red and green, debouched into pleasant valleys down which purled and murmured sparkling mountain streams, across plateaus where giant pines towered to dizzy heights, over granite-ribbed slopes, seemingly the foundations of the earth pushed to the surface; above and beyond were the snow-topped Sierras apparently joining the sky. It was the beauty of wilderness, a landscape wrought by the Titans. The ladies, although sorely tired, forgot their weariness and fatigue, and voiced their wonder in little cries of amazement, as at some jutting point there stood revealed the depths of gorge and canyon, or a glimpse was caught of white-blanketed peaks climbing heavenward. Fascinating as was the panorama they did not linger, as night was coming on. Tex urged on the horses (the ladies were riding those of Rance and Brant, which had been sent back from Sacramento) and the men trudged along sturdily, until just as twilight fell they

reached their destination. To Rance and Brant it was the close of a holiday, the distractions and pleasures of which they renounced without regret; to the mother and daughter, the beginning of another life in a new and strange world; to Wakefield, it should have been a homecoming to familiar scenes.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. WAKEFIELD AND DOT ENJOY CAMP LIFE

MIKE met the party with the sincerest of welcomes, putting off the cloak of gravity in which, since he had taken on the dignity of manager, he had wrapped himself.

"Sure, I 'm as glad to see you back as I was sorry to have you lave," he cried, shaking Wakefield's hand with a grasp that betokened his pleasure. "It's a bigger City of Six than whin you wint away, and a better one now that ye 're back again. No one is more plased to see you than Mike."

Wakefield greeted him with lacklustre eye and passive handclasp, but brightened up when he heard the word "Mike."

" 'Michael Cassio, lieutenant to the warlike Moor,' " he quoted, " 'the great contention of the seas and skies parted our friendship.' "

The puzzled Mike stared and dropped his partner's hand — the meaning was beyond him, — but was spared further confusion by Rance, who made a diversion by summoning him to meet the women.

"Take no notice of him," Rance whispered; "there 's a mutiny in his mind, and I will explain later."

The mother and daughter fully repaid Mike for any coldness on Wakefield's part, immediately claiming him as an old friend — had they not known him ever since the beginnings of The City of Six? Mike blushed, wondering if their knowledge extended to those lapses that marked his earlier career, and then turned the current of their thoughts by saying,

"Sure, it 's tired, sore, and weary you must be; you 'll have plenty of time to know us all for better or for worse in the days coming; let me show you your house and introduce you to Mrs. Ruth. It 's me manners I 'm forgetting and she working all the day with a feast for to cilibrate your arrival, her that anxious the house should be prepared and comfortable. I 'm called the boss of the camp, but it 's not so — she 's the rale boss, and nobody dare dispute it."

Ruth stood at the boarding-house door — curious but resolved not to make any advances, — when Mike approached and introduced them, but she unbent enough to take them in charge and lead them to the new house. Tired as they were,

they broke into exclamations of pleased surprise as Ruth showed them the interior. It goes without saying that under Ruth's vigilant eye, it was as neat as the proverbial pin; it was more, there were the homelike touches in arrangement and adornment that could only be given by a capable woman, and Ruth had expended much energy and care in the preparation.

The same thought came to Mrs. Wakefield that had come to the sick Rance after he had climbed the steep canyon some months before.

"Oh, it's heavenly, a heavenly rest," she cried as she sank with a tired but satisfied sigh into the inviting rocking-chair, "it's so much beyond anything we expected," and Dot echoed her mother's words.

Ruth was pleased more than she cared to show and bustled around, helping them off with their hats and dusters.

"Your baggage got here yesterday," she informed them; "it's in the next room. Don't hurry. When you tidy up a bit you will find supper waiting; you all must be hungry," and she left them and trotted back to the boarding-house, where Tex was awaiting her. "For gracious' sake, go wash off the dust! You're a

sight!" was the loving welcome she extended him. He started to obey, when Rance came up and without ado kissed Mrs. Ruth on the cheek, much to her confusion and surprise at his temerity.

"Well, I 'm damned," muttered Tex, "and she did not scratch him," recalling a few secret attempted love passages on his part which had resulted disastrously. As for Ruth, she was not very angry, although she made Rance's cheek tingle with a slap and declared that he had lost his manners while away.

Supper over, a generous and dainty meal for which Ruth was duly complimented, the newcomers retired, and Mike, Rance, and Tex lit their pipes and wandered off up the flat, seating themselves under a lofty pine, out of earshot of the camp.

"What's the matter with the old man?" asked Mike, "I don't believe that he knew me, what with his Michael Cassio and his contintions, and you noticed that he never spoke a word while we were ateing supper. He takes no interest whatever in the camp or the mine; you would n't think he was a quarter owner in one of the best properties in the State."

Rance briefly told the condition that he had

found Wakefield in, the unquestioned fact that his mind was unbalanced, and the fears he had that the malady was growing on him.

"He has Shakespeare on the brain," continued Rance, "and he has studied the plays until he not only has them by heart, but peoples the present with the characters. Most of the time he is silent and brooding until the hallucination possesses him. Then I am Mercutio, Orlando, or Prince Henry. Brant to him is a veritable Iago in the flesh, and you remember that he dubbed you Michael Cassio. It's a fantastic mix-up and there is nothing to do that I can see but to wait until the family settles down and then seek some professional advice. Possibly his being here among his old partners and old work will bring a cure."

"There was nothing wrong with his head when he wint away," commented Mike, "and he's the last man on the green earth that I would look for to turn looney."

There was nothing in the case that seemed to call for any interference, and the conclusion was reached, for the present at least, to ignore his idiosyncrasies in the hope that the quiet life, the

mountains, and familiar associations would restore him to his old self.

Mike and Tex were both emphatic in their admiration of Mrs. Wakefield and Dot.

"It don't need a telescope to see they are rale ladies," remarked Mike, "and I 'm glad they are here; they 'll be just in time to dance at the wedding."

"What wedding?" asked Rance.

"Oh, we have a bit of news of our own. Ye did n't know that Mrs. Ruth has persuaded the judge to break the bonds. Ask Tex, he is the most interested party outside of the widdy herself; sure, he 's put in all of his spare time coorting ever since ye wint away."

"Congratulations, old man," exclaimed Rance, clapping the confused Texan on the back. "You could not have made a better choice. If I had not seen how matters stood long ago, I would have had some pretensions myself, although she thinks I am too lazy and trifling to ever come to any good."

Tex took the banter good-naturedly, although he blushed red to the ears as he stammeringly confirmed Mike's news.

"I've knocked around this yere world alone ever since I was a pup, camping where night found me, and I never knew what solid comfort was until Mrs. Sage came to the camp. That first husband of hern must have been an ornery hound not to appreciate such a woman."

Perhaps he was, but a sharp tongue will wear away the patience of the meekest of men; and Rance could not restrain the thought that the deserter had some justification for his flight. On the other hand, Tex's phlegmatic disposition and easy-going methods possibly needed just such a spur as Ruth would supply; and, besides, he was now a capitalist with hazy ideas as to the value of money or the risks of investments. He had decided that if all went well he would go down to the great valleys, select a big ranch, and raise cattle. The life appealed to him; he had gone over the project with Ruth, who liked the idea, and after they were married they would take a vacation and start in quest of the promised land.

Then Brant sauntered up, having held aloof from the group during their talk, as he was virtually an outsider; but he also had plans for the future revolving in his head, and wanted to advise with the capable Mike.

"I am through with cards," he said, "and I'm pretty well fixed. Mining interests me; it's a good deal of a gamble anyhow, and I believe that I will try my fortune on the ridge. The only trouble that I can see is that if I go up against the game with what little knowledge I have of it, the percentage will be against me. In fact, I'm a sucker, with the saving grace that I know it. Now, if I could have the benefit of your advice and experience, you might steer me right. You find the ground, and I will put up the money."

The proposal interested Mike, whom, by the way, Brant punctiliously addressed as "Mr. Donovan"; and with a promise of having a further talk over it the party broke up and sought their respective beds.

It was well along into August and the summer's heat was at its fiercest, the grass had withered and crackled under the tread of feet, the blue smoke hung over the mountains and dimmed the view, the alder leaves drooped, the snow, except on the loftiest peaks, or in the deep gorges where the sun shone not, melted and disappeared, the sparkling streams receded into tiny rivulets, in the mid-day hours the piping quail

sought the shade of the densest coverts, the vociferous blue jay hushed its raucous note, and even that essence of life and energy, the red chipmunk, paused in its merry round. And yet it was not oppressive; the air was as pure and as stimulating as old wine, and there was relief and comfort under the shade of the live oak.

The coming of Wakefield and his family had but temporarily disturbed the routine of the camp. The mine continued to yield its treasure lavishly, the work had become methodical, the company was not troubled by intruders, the channel on the point proved to be the only rich gravel on that side of the ridge, and life was sedate and prosy and almost without incident. There were those in the camp who toiled not; Rance loafed and took his ease, and Brant, escaping from the sordid life and vulgar associations of a profession that he was about to put behind him, was an almost constant visitor.

Mrs. Wakefield and Dot, charmed with the novelty of their experiences, soon grew accustomed to the surroundings. The tonic of the pines, the pungent air, the healing breath of the soft winds, the open-siesta air on the veranda, had the desired and prophesied effect; the invalid

was soon convalescent, and a complete cure was assured. As for Dot, she was a bird let loose, an irresponsible creature fascinated with the novelty of it all, freed from the fetters and shackles that exacted rigid compliance with the narrow customs and the heed for established proprieties, founded on generations of Puritanical limitations. She looked back on the social village life, where the least step outside beaten paths, the slightest departure from unwritten but well understood laws of conduct, called forth the scathing criticism of the village gossips. It was all so different here. In the eyes of the camp she was a young goddess to whom all paid homage. The freedom of the mountains was hers, an unfettered domain in which she was at liberty to walk, to ride, to pass her idle hours — and it was all leisure — at her own sweet will — with exceptions. These latter were not very irksome. Although she had agreed that it was paradise, there were snakes in its borders. At the spring a warning rattle had brought her to a halt, happily at a safe distance. An ugly head arose out of shining coils, two horrid bead-like eyes shot threatening glances and watched for an aggressive movement and then, much to her relief, the

coils unfolded and with sinuous grace the reptile glided away into the weeds and out of sight.

She was warned that there were also human reptiles infesting the country. Thieves and assassins lurked and hid along the trails, in waiting for the flush miner, the passing wayfarer, levying illegal tolls and not hesitating to add murder to robbery. An unprotected girl was not safe outside the bounds of the camp, and Dot was entreated to limit her wanderings. While she laughed at the warnings, she was secretly impressed, and then Rance had an adventure that frightened her into a willing obedience.

CHAPTER XV

RANCE ESCAPES FROM ROBBERS AND FALLS IN LOVE

IT had been Mike's custom on Sundays to ride either to Downieville or over to Forest Hill, taking with him the week's product of the mine and depositing it in the express office for conveyance to the United States Assay Office at San Francisco. The danger involved in these weekly treasure-bearing trips was well understood, but Mike was fearless and withal prudent and cautious, going well armed, and so far had not been molested. After Rance's return this task had been delegated to him, and as he had sworn never to visit Downieville again it was to the more distant Forest City that he carried the dust. The trail did not climb directly over the ridge — the mountain was too steep, — but followed along the slope westward to a gap that cut through and gave easy access to the basin through which Kanaka Creek flowed. In a little valley just around the bend of the creek, a Mexican had pitched his tent, built a rude shack, and established a wayside stopping-place where mule packers,

horsemen, and footmen could procure a meal and other minor comforts. He was assisted in his duty as host by two daughters, olive-skinned types of the Spanish-Indian mixture, that had peopled the country before the arrival of the pestilent "Gringo."

Rance had met these brown *muchachas* and partaken of their hospitality, and one Sunday encountered one of them, as he supposed, a mile or so from the inn, walking along the path. He gallantly offered her a mount on the horse, insisting that the animal could carry double, and was somewhat surprised at her positive refusal, as the girls were not famed for shyness; but in deference to her scruples, he offered to dismount and give her the sole occupancy of the saddle while he walked alongside. He was more astonished when she waved him away with violent gesture, exclaiming, *"Vayase V. en seguida, sino quiere que le maten!"* ("Be off quickly, if you do not want to be killed!") Still more puzzled, he had sense enough to heed, and rode on down to the inn. Here he met the Mexican, to whom he told of his offer and the emphatic refusal, asking why the *muchacha* was so positive in declining the courtesy.

"Señor, V. se equivoca, ella no era mi hija porque las dos están en casa." ("You are mistaken; she was not my daughter; my girls are both in the house.") And to prove to the incredulous Rance the truth of his assertion he called them out of the kitchen, where they were occupied in the preparation of a meal. The mystified Rance acknowledged his error, continued on to Forest City, deposited his treasure, and took the trail back again. When he reached the Mexican's house he was met by two excited girls. *"Dios mio! de qué peligro se ha escapado V.! Era Murieta y sus bandoleros."* ("My God, what a danger you have escaped! It was Murieta and his band.")

It transpired that Rance had not been gone fifteen minutes when this famed bandit, who at that time was leaving a bloody trail throughout the northern counties, had dashed up to the inn, accompanied by half a dozen desperadoes, Greasers like himself, and a Mexican girl, undoubtedly she who had given Rance the timely warning. Murieta eagerly questioned his compatriot as to whether Rance had passed, how long he had tarried, and what time had lapsed since his departure, and seemed much chagrined

to learn that his prey had escaped him. Rance by that time was well along the banks of the creek, which was thickly dotted by miners' cabins and too well settled to risk a foray.

"Maldito Americano! no podemos cojerlo, y cuando vuelva ya no tendra nada." ("Damn the American! we cannot catch him, and when he returns he will have nothing.")

The robbers were bold enough to remain until a meal had been prepared for them, and disposed of, at the conclusion of which the renowned Joaquin tossed his countryman a fifty-dollar gold "slug," and rode away down the ridge. The girls gathered from the talk that they were hastening to their haunts in the southern counties, their depredations having aroused the region roundabout, and that they feared pursuit. They had learned in some way of Rance's treasure-laden trip, by a miscalculation had failed to intercept him, and were disappointed in missing a rich prize.

What motive had impelled the girl to warn him of his danger and urge his escape remained a mystery; but there was no doubt that she had saved his life, for Murieta was a merciless scoundrel who invariably added murder to robbery when a

hated American was the victim. After that incident more caution was exercised. The Sunday trip ceased, no particular day was chosen, and Brant went along as an escort.

The only fly in the honey now was Wakefield's continued aberrations. Mentally he made no improvement. He was in a curious state—docile, tractable, and yet silent, apathetic, seemingly caring little for his kin and less for his friends. He submitted to the loving care lavished on him by his daughter and Rance with an exasperating indifference that was disheartening and discouraging. The operations at the mine were of no interest to him, nor did he thank Fortune for the gifts she was bringing him. The past was a misty blank, his own part in it a waning memory; he was not concerned in the present, nor anxious as to the future. He betrayed no emotion, no feeling, except when the experiment was tried of depriving him of his prized volume. When he missed it, he broke into so fierce an outburst of rage and anger that haste was made to restore it, and again in possession, he relapsed into indifference. Occasionally his moody silence gave way to a torrent of speech, in which he quoted page after page of the plays, and while

under this influence his lacklustre eyes lighted up, his listlessness dropped away, and the phantoms of his imagination, "spirits called from the vasty deep," became more real than the presence of the sympathetic circle who mourned to see—

"That noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh."

Suffering himself to be guided like a little child, he ate, slept, and drank with a dull regularity; the remainder of the time he gave himself up to brooding,—a dead soul in a quick body. All attempts to rouse him from this lethargy resulted, when successful, in emphasizing his mania, and this quickening of the intelligence was always with the same result, speech confined to the one matter; and in that channel it was marvellous. It was as if his brain was a printed book which to his mind's eye was ever open, a legible page from which his tongue read at will, although incoherently, the quotations as a rule being most absurdly inapplicable.

There were many anxious consultations anent the situation. There was always the fear that his brain twist might take violent form, when he would do harm to himself and others. Treatment in an asylum was suggested, but the dis-

tressed wife could not bear the thought of this; travel and consultation with specialists was suggested as an alternative, but the burden of his care was too much to be borne by those who would be compelled to assume the guardianship; and it was finally agreed to remain at the camp, at least until the close of the season, in the meantime summoning an alienist and submitting the case to him for such treatment as might be determined upon.

The hamlet sank into a prosperous and uneventful routine with hardly a ripple to disturb its placidity. Ruth, despite her angles and acidity, had a warm heart, and the latent intolerance with which she had at first accepted the intruders of her own sex, melted away as her sympathies were aroused by their affliction.

"They were trifling enough to insinuate that if we lost our power of speech it would please them; they don't like to be told of their faults and shortcomings. A man who could n't talk, gracious! that is another thing,—if Mr. Potter lost his tongue, he 'd lose me."

This way of looking at it did not hinder her from putting the brighter side of it before Mrs. Wakefield, and this was done with a delicacy and

tact that was surprising. The truth was, Mrs. Ruth was mellowing. The hurt her mean-spirited husband had inflicted in so basely deserting her had been a deep-rankling wound. She had been a good and industrious wife, so she thought, and did not comprehend but that was her full duty. The little thorns she had carried under her tongue, the multitude of sharp stabs she had dealt out to him in upbraiding him for his shiftlessness (that was her favorite word of reproach), like the continual dropping of water had at last worn him out, and he had fled. The City of Six had to her been a city of refuge. If she was contentious, the men smoked their pipes and retreated out of earshot. Did she insist on that badge of servitude, that token of an effete and despised civilization, the "biled shirt," well, it was only one day in a week; and considering how consistently she looked after their creature comforts in other matters they could gracefully concede the point. After a time they came to take a certain pride in it; it was a distinction that set them apart from their less particular friends of neighboring camps; and the gibes and jeers of the Hepsidamers and the boys over on Kanaka Creek were borne with equanimity. Not by all, perhaps.

It was asserted that some of the more cowardly ones kept a blue woollen shirt hidden out in the manzanita thickets and, when visiting neighboring towns, retired to the depths of the chaparral, shed the white and donned the blue again, changing on their return. After all, these concessions made for cleanliness and for health and restraint, and kept The City of Six on a moral plane that was unique among its rivals.

What perhaps contributed the most to sweeten Ruth's acerbity, besides the reflection that possibly her methods with her first husband had not been such as to insure full conjugal happiness, was her altered place in the camp. Although her sway from the first had been supreme, still her position to begin with had been a menial one; she was a hired domestic working for wages. This had not troubled her very much until it became known that Wakefield was to return with his family. She felt as if she could not brook a rival, certainly not a mistress, who would interfere in her duties, arrogating that right as the wife of one of the principal owners. Now, as the prospective wife of Tex, she stood on equal footing, and as Mrs. Wakefield had shown no desire to enter into any strife for mastery, there was no occasion for envy or dis-

cord. Instead, her heart went out to the woman, and her active sympathy and practical way of meeting the situation went far to soften and console the afflicted wife. Her own wedding was set for no distant date, and both she and Tex were of the opinion that so long as the mine continued to pour out its golden stream it would be folly to abandon it for more uncertain investments. This decision had been reached after a liberal offer made by Brant to buy Tex's interest. The prospective marriage caused a mild anticipatory excitement in the camp, and there was a general understanding that the event was to be celebrated in a way that would do credit to all concerned.

Rance, since the arrival of Mrs. Wakefield and Dot, had degenerated into a confirmed and contented idler. He had been a favorite with Ruth, primarily because no one could resist his coaxing ways and sunny disposition. He was a well-bred gentleman who did not need to assert it; his breeding was obvious and made itself manifest in kindly consideration for others. However. he was a born rebel, and did not submit to all of Mrs. Ruth's regulations; but then he was so good-natured, so humble in his chiv-

alric deference to her sex, that she petted and pampered him, looked after his little comforts, and in her treatment contradicted all her precepts. This had not filled the void in Rance's life. He hankered after the flesh-pots of Egypt, the luxuries of civilization. He was a lover of nature and found much that was congenial in his surroundings: the mountains appealed to him, the liberty of thought and action where every one was a law unto himself was not unpleasant; the insidious charm of climate was working insensibly in his veins, and he came back to it from his vacation almost reconciled to a continuance.

Yet he had had a shock; the horrible scene to which he had been an involuntary witness — the murder of the Mexican woman by the mob — had filled his soul with disgust. He could not look down the mountain to the town without a sensation of loathing and hate for the savages who had committed the dastardly action, and he had religiously kept his vow not to put his foot again inside the limits of the place. The memory of the incident for a time was a nightmare to him, and he had about determined to take up his residence at San Francisco, when Wakefield's return, his sad condition, — and what was really

the underlying motive for the reconsideration, the discovery that the wife was a refined and attractive woman and the daughter a sweet bit of femininity just budding into womanhood, both needing in their perplexing situation the services and guidance of a disinterested friend, persuaded him to delay. He found it a pleasant task he had undertaken, and this was the deciding influence that led him to postpone his leave-taking and for a time devote himself to that duty. It was fortunate that Wakefield was so tractable; he really gave no trouble, followed when bidden, acquiesced in any suggestion, and was never more contented apparently than when wandering around the hills in company with Rance and Dot. His presence preserved the proprieties and yet was no hindrance to an intimacy that was soon established between the pair. Dot and Rance had agreed it was to be the ideal friendship, the mutual trust and confidence between congenial spirits — comrades as it were, for Dot had chosen her path. She was to be the good angel of her stricken sire, his prop and shield; she looked ahead to long years of disinterested and loving service unless, happily, his restoration to sanity was accomplished. What nobler task, she asked Rance,

than to give oneself to such a duty? And he gravely acquiesced, although perhaps he was not quite so sure of it. So they passed the happy hours away, loitering in the green woods and under the stately pines, those perfect days that Nature offers to those who attune themselves in accord, the pagan charm of the Sierra foothills. They were playing with fire, both man and maid, for there was an attachment, the growth of this daily intimacy, that was binding them in stronger fetters than that of mere friendship and was fast ripening into a closer bond. The untutored girl had no prescience of this; she was too happy and too ignorant to give herself any self-examination; she only knew, or faintly realized, that this was indeed paradise, herself too pure and innocent to anticipate the intrusion of the serpent. Her father was with her in all her walks and wanderings, and if she gave any thought to the situation it was that she was engaged in the filial task that she had taken on herself. There were hours when Rance was absent, and the world did not go so well. The sun did not shine so brightly, the woods were not so attractive, the companionship of the father became a little irksome; but this she explained by charging the tediousness to

moods. "One cannot be always exalted," she ingenuously told Rance, and that worthy admitted that he also had his blue days, which seemed to fall on the occasions when he rode away with the treasure to Forest City, and this, he argued, was due to the responsibility which, thrust upon him, brought him back to the practical affairs of life.

In the self-communings of these lonely rides, Rance began to get a glimmering of the true conditions; and while he was neither startled nor displeased, it compelled him to a little more serious thought. He had looked upon and accepted Dot as a child, a charming, unsophisticated girl who, while the opposite of the rustic maiden of his imagination, was too young to be dignified into a marriageable quantity; and he now realized that from his own standpoint he was as mistaken in this as in his previous mental deductions. Instead, she was budding into womanhood, and this tall, graceful, self-possessed maiden was as attractive in person as in mind. Rance never tired of admiring the abundant mass of wavy brown hair, coiled and crowning her well-poised head, the Greek contour of her profile, the expressive eyes half hidden under the long lashes,

the small mouth and full red lips, the rounded curves of form and the lightness and springiness of step, that sign of youth and health. And then, she was endowed with an alertness of mind, a sense of humor so rare in women, a sympathetic ear; in fact, when Rance, in his meditations, dwelt on all these graces, he could see only the perfect woman, and great was his wonderment that such a pearl should have found its way to so prosaic a place as The City of Six.

CHAPTER XVI

BRANT AND MRS. WAKEFIELD BECOME FRIENDLY

TO Brant had come the knowledge that there were compensations to be found in legitimate pursuits that were unknown in his old career. While he was the capitalist rather than the miner, and left to others the hard work and toil and was only interested in the output, yet he was as coldly calculating in his role of employer as he had been in his old profession, seleeting his men for their skill and capacity and liberally rewarding them for intelligent service. Under Mike's guidance he had bought out two promising locations on the supposed course of the channel just over the ridge, and was driving a tunnel under the mountain to intersect it, an adit that would penetrate through some two thousand feet of bedrock before reaching the gravel bed, if it existed. This meant a preliminary investment of at least twenty thousand dollars, a dead loss if there was a miscalculation, an unprofitable outlay if the channel was there and the gravel not so rich as anticipated.

On the other hand, all the old river-beds where opened had been rich with gold, and success meant a return of a hundred-fold.

So after all it was really a gamble, and as Brant put it, if Nature had not stacked the cards against him he reckoned it would be a profitable deal. As it would consume at least a year before the preliminary work of boring the tunnel could be completed, Brant had but little to occupy his time beyond a daily ride to the claims and a rather impatient overlook of the progress being made. It seemed to him that he had started on an interminable and never-ending task. It was the day of hand drilling and black powder as contrasted with the present machine drills and dynamite, and although the work never ceased, day or night, the hard rock was stubborn and five or six feet was the average daily progression. Was he chasing a rainbow with the mythical pot of gold at the other end? Was all this talk of buried rivers and extinguished water courses a fantastic theory evolved to fit the chance deposits along the ridge, or was it a world-fact that in the dim past that theologians denied and science timidly revealed, gigantic forces had sported with mountain and valley, uplifting and remoulding,

vomiting ashes and lava over crest and canyon, sealing the book of record until the avarice of man and the lure of gold re-opened its pages? He had plenty of leisure to speculate on these problems, although he vexed his brain but little in that direction. Gambler that he was, he never questioned the Biblical story of creation, and belief taught him that no such transformation could be wrought in the brief centuries since the earth was evolved out of chaos; he had no ambition to reconcile science and religion, and so dismissed the subject from his mind.

While he had become an accepted dweller in the camp, he had been unable to establish that same bond of comradeship that existed between the partners. The original members had the pride of the pioneer; they had discovered the wealth of the lead that gave it existence, had endured the hardships and shared the good fortune of its prosperous growth, and in the intimate life there had grown a tie of brotherhood, an affectionate concern for and in each other's affairs that knit each closely to the other. Brant did not reach this inner circle of fraternal regard. He was an intruder, a self-invited visitor whose pursuits were distinct from and not in

common with those of his associates. Not that he was made to feel this; on the contrary, he was placed on the most friendly footing, but unconsciously the line was drawn. Mike was too busy with the supervision of the property to give any of his valuable time to hospitable duties; Tex had his romance which absorbed him; and Rance, to whom was due Brant's presence in the place, had drifted away in another path, taking upon himself the care of Wakefield, a duty more cheerfully undertaken, perhaps, from the fact that Dot and her father were inseparable. To be sure, there were the reunions at the table and the siesta under the pines when twilight fell, but here a curious embarrassment arose.

It was evident that Wakefield had conceived and held a bitter dislike toward Brant. While this was not demonstrated by any marked outburst or hostile act, still by that telepathic interchange of mind and thought Wakefield's intolerance was mentally conveyed. He had dubbed Brant "Iago" at the first encounter, and from that day had bestowed no further recognition beyond a muttered excerpt that fitted the treacherous Venetian's character. At times

his eye lighted up with a baleful hate unmistakable in its malignancy, and the little group feared an overt demonstration, although it was only a momentary mood, as he quickly lapsed into his usual apathy. His attitude was more marked in the outdoor wanderings. Here nothing would persuade him to accept or remain in Brant's company, and any attempt to share the walks was balked by a sullen and silent refusal to join.

As Mrs. Wakefield, although almost restored to health, was still an invalid, she contented herself with a lazy life that involved no exertion beyond the comfort of a rocking-chair and the manufacture of tidies and other vexatious adornments, interrupted by an occasional visit to or from Ruth. Her sorrow over her husband's strange affliction became less poignant as time passed and she bore the cross without complaint. There was always the hope of restoration and the solace of his comrades' sympathy, and not one of them gave more sincere expression to this feeling than Brant.

Out of harmony in all other directions, here at least was a relief from the solitude and ennui that oppressed him, and it was not long before he was on a most friendly footing. So much

of his old life as would bear relating he confided to her, and she was a sympathetic listener and in turn gossiped of her native village, its oppressive atmosphere and narrow social restrictions, the dull round of simple diversions, the two trips to that wonderful place, New York, visits that had revealed a new world and filled her with longing for an escape from the stupid town; the return of her husband and the abandonment of the old life — not very startling or exciting happenings, for beyond the voyage to California her existence had run on without ineident. And here it was all so new and so strange. The dead weight of ancient customs was lifted, the Puritanical fetters that regulated the daily walk, the obsequious deference paid to Mrs. Grundy, the absence of those pin-pricks of village criticism that tyrannized the conduct and paralyzed the will of the boldest; all these suddenly vanished, and although the little hamlet numbered scarce a hundred souls, it was as broadly cosmopolitan and as tolerant as the biggest of cities. At first her mind gave but a tired acquiescence to the breaking down of the old barriers and left her in a state of mental topsy-turviness. There was an inward protest

against this freedom that brooked none of the old restraints, that recognized no class distinctions, that measured the individual by his achievements and ridiculed any pretension that was not justified by his work. In her birthplace Mike would have been impossible, yet here he loomed up as the one man capable. He was illiterate, his brogue was deliciously absurd, he had been a brawler, a rollicking wine-bibber, a type that she had been taught to regard as a pariah; here he commanded respect and obedience by force of dominant will and capability.

And Tex, a large-minded, careless frontiersman, who was a stranger to the polish and social amenities of civilization—how dwarfed in comparison were her old acquaintances, the aristocratic country banker, the aspiring clerk, the humdrum lawyer, the plodding farmer, in contrast with this simple giant. As she listened to his reminiscences of a border life, thrilling episodes that were told as commonplace occurrences, he was to her imagination a man who had done things other than lend money at usury, measure tape, settle village quarrels, or raise a crop of corn.

It was Rance, however, that upset all her tra-

ditions and dispelled lifelong prejudices. The seed of abolitionism had grown and flourished in the Mohawk Valley, and the slaveholder had been held in abhorrence and detestation. While politics were of but little interest to her, the prejudices aroused by the fulminations against slavery and slaveholders had so biassed her mind that she could see no good that could come out of Nazareth; and yet Rance, a type of the South, upset all her theories, beliefs, and traditions. He was an oppressor and nigger-driver, had lived off the toil and sweat of the slave, and yet was so absurdly different from anything she had imagined. He was kindly, considerate, tolerant of others' opinions and not intolerant in the expression of his own; if he was a fair representative she would needs revise her opinions. Not that she pondered very deeply on the matter; it was only one of the many revisions that this new life made necessary.

With restored health there at first came a sense of loneliness, a feeling that she was outside of the general affairs of the camp. Her husband's strange monomania had brought about a partial estrangement. He had apparently ceased to recognize her as a wife, carrying it so far

as to refuse to dwell under the same roof. Indulging the whim, Rance had given him a bunk in the office and there he slept, taking his meals at the boarding-house and passing the day in woodland rambles with his daughter, to whom he gave a dogged fidelity. As Rance felt it incumbent upon himself to guard them both, the wife saw but little of him, and Brant became her companion and consoler.

To the man the companionship had an indescribable charm. Self-ostracized from contact with all good women (for in his old profession they had gathered up their skirts and passed him by in scorn), his enforced association with the other kind had bred in him a contempt for the sex; for gambler that he had been, he had remained a clean man morally. A bird of prey, perhaps, prospering and thriving on the passions and weaknesses of mankind, yet he could not refrain from despising his victims for their weakness. "They know the percentage is against them. Why do they buck at the game?" was his comment; and then, as his thoughts wandered to his late investments, he wondered if he were not going up against a deal where the cards might not run in his favor. However, but a small part of his

fortune was staked on the venture, and there was just enough element of chance to interest him in the play.

The little porch fronting the Wakefield dwelling became his afternoon lounging-place. There was not much in common to talk about, for he shrank from delving into his own past and he did not grow over-confidential in his confidences. Enough that he had been born and bred a gentleman, and that his pride of family and descent remained. He delicately hinted that his profession had not been so much a matter of his own choosing, having been forced upon him by circumstances beyond his control; and had he not abandoned it when most prosperous? He carefully concealed the fact that his capital still backed the faro games over at Moore's Flat and Alleghany, and that he was in receipt of substantial dividends from these speculative ventures, and Mrs. Wakefield regarded him as a brand plucked from the burning, a sinner who had yielded to temptation and then turned back to the straight and narrow path. Poor woman, her experiences had been so limited and her life so humdrum, that a distinction between a real and a sham reform was beyond her judgment.

In truth she had no desire to play the judge. She felt herself outside of the currents of the camp. Her husband treated her as a stranger; with an inward resentment she understood that her daughter had usurped her place in his affections, not comprehending that her invalidism had prevented her from taking active steps to interfere, or that Dot had unselfishly assumed the burden. The mine and its outpouring of wealth was most unattractive; in fact, she almost hated it, for with feminine inconsistency, to it she ascribed the misfortune that clouded her husband's brain.

The monotonous days had passed almost without notice as to external impressions. The inimitable mountains, the deep gorges, the wonderful atmosphere, with their soothing that had brought back health and should have renewed the joy of living, gave her no pleasure. Her soul was filled with discontent, and she became possessed with a desire to get away from it all. Even Ruth jarred on her nerves; Ruth, who in her new awakening was blooming like a fresh if somewhat matured rose, and could not understand why in this to her well-ordered world one should give way to

the "hypos." There had been a time when she had taken a gloomy view of life, but that was before Tex had loomed up large on her horizon. Now she realized that the ways of Providence were strange and past finding out, yet worked for the good of those who trusted and bore up. So she gave well-meant advice to the wife to "chipper up," for things would come out all right if she only had patience to wait.

Brant took much the same view, although he contrived to extend his sympathies a little more delicately. He could enter into her feelings with a more perfect understanding, for was he not a lonely spectator, craving friendship denied him, and forced to endure an isolation which he had not contemplated when leaving his old life behind him? Insensibly the two grew closer together and he became her confidant and a sympathizing listener to her fancied troubles. So it came about that his afternoons were passed upon the little porch, and a bond of intimacy was established, innocent enough in its inception, and yet more dangerous than either one anticipated. The woman, deprived of the affection of her mate by a cruel stroke of fate, and craving a sympathetic pity, found those who should have

given it following their own devices, and it was not strange that she gave to Brant a glimpse of this longing for consolation in her troubles; nor was it more strange that he, at first without any thought of disloyalty or treachery, found in her attitude and weakness a response to his own mental state.

The summer days began to shorten; the big pines threw longer shadows on the mountain-side; the air grew chill; the frost touched the foliage of the alder trees, and they blazed into yellow; the oak leaves, detached from the branches, sailed through the air and heaped up in the hollows, or scurried in battalions down the slopes. A sharp shower came from the south; the blue haze and smoke that overhung the range disappeared; the dust, stirred up from the brown dry earth by every vagrant wind, turning every twig and blade of grass to a dirty drab, was washed away, and Nature woke up and put on a clean face. For five long months the sun had blazed fiercely, burning all vegetation to a crisp, and then came the first rain. The City of Six welcomed the change, although it meant the near approach of the storms and tempests of winter, the snowfall that would blanket the earth

and close in the little hamlet for a long dreary season. Still, it would not be the complete isolation of the previous winter. A half-dozen prosperous camps had sprung up over the ridge and, by aid of snowshoes, could be reached. Besides, the little hamlet had become sufficient to itself. A hundred workers could find resources in the way of amusements that would break the monotony. The town now boasted a post-office and a mail rider who was confident of keeping communication open; and for those who craved more excitement than the sober little camp furnished, the county-seat on the river below them was accessible. With its five thousand inhabitants and all the accessories of a lively, wide-open, prosperous town—gambling-houses, hotels, and even a theatre — at Downieville, The City of Six would not be cut off from the world. The miners were an exceptionally steady lot, earning handsome wages, and, barring a few who elected to return to the lower foothills and valley, had agreed to stay with the camp.

Mike with wise forethought had brought in ample supplies during the summer; many cabins, tight and comfortable, had been built; mine timbers and firewood cut, and all due prepara-

tions made for the comfort of the men and the uninterrupted operation of the mine. It was a wonderful claim, and its rich yield gave no present indication of exhaustion. In six months the gross output had been one hundred and eighty thousand dollars in virgin gold, of which the profit was about seventy per cent — a very comfortable dividend for the quartette of owners — and even Mrs. Wakefield felt that life was not all in vain, and that while her burden was heavy there were compensations.

CHAPTER XVII

A WEDDING IN HIGH LIFE

IN *The Downieville Messenger* of November 7, 1853, a glowing and most enthusiastic description was given of the wedding ceremony which joined Tex and the widow. "Ye editor," as the writer referred to himself, was present and, as the boys remarked, "slung high-falutin' English to the Queen's taste." Tex was referred to as a flower of chivalry, a hero of a hundred battles, a gentleman who had never retreated in the face of an enemy or gone back on a friend, a leading and honored citizen of Sierra County who had crowned a successful career by the capture of one of the loveliest of her sex, or rather had surrendered at discretion to the charms of a lady whose residence at The City of Six had made that camp the envy of all of its neighbors. The writer was equally eloquent over the banquet, "the preparation of which was superintended by the charming bride herself, a fact that made it an occasion when 'Lucullus dined with Lucullus.'"

It was holiday at the camp. Rance and Mike had scoured the towns round about for every

delicacy that could be found and had even sent to Marysville, sixty miles away, for chickens, turkeys, eggs, and other high-priced luxuries. Besides, there were mountain quail, wild pigeon, grouse, venison, and bear meat, brought in by the mighty hunters of the ridge; and to these were added sundry baskets of champagne, packed over from Forest City, Alleghany, and Moore's Flat—Brant's contribution to the occasion.

The Chinese cook, who under the tuition of Mrs. Ruth had developed into a high-class artist, had called half a dozen of his countrymen to his aid and bossed the kitchen with great skill and dignity.

"Me likee Missy Wakefield, Missy Dot, me mo' likee Missy Luth. Melican man he foolee me; Missy Luth she talkee little, he no foolee any mo'. Now she mally Tex, he belly good man, he no likee she cook. Tong boss, one hundled dolla hap me catch, what fo' wanta betta job?"

Just what he said to his yellow-skinned retinue was beyond ken, but he drilled them assiduously in their duties and duly impressed upon them the importance of the event. Even the grinning squaws had developed a latent energy and had

put in the previous week in an orgy of clothes-washing, for every man jack in the camp felt it was due to Mrs. Ruth that a white shirt should be donned in her honor, and to their credit be it said that not one of them grumbled over what to the majority was a distasteful concession.

Dot, conspiring with Rance, had looked after the trousseau and had furnished him with a list which, duly filled at the "Bay," had resulted in a combination of lace, silk, and other tasty adornments that swelled Ruth's heart with pride.

As for Tex, Rance, at his pleading request, had undertaken his outfit, and Rosenstern over at the Flat imported from "Frisco" the finest black broadcloth suit procurable.

"My frient, there isn't a sport in the State that's got a better one; I give you mine honor, it cost me a hundred and twenty dollars, and my brudder let me have it at wholesale price."

Tex shied at the white gloves and begged to be let off; but Rance was inexorable, and poor Tex had a bad half-hour encasing his big hands in them.

"It's the first pair of kids I ever put on," he dolefully remarked, "and it will be the last; buckskin is good enough for me."

There had been one distressing incident that for a time threatened to put a damper on the festivities. Wakefield, who had been listlessly lounging around taking no particular notice of the event, made a misstep off the porch of the boarding-house, and falling, struck his head heavily on a projecting stone step. The blow knocked him insensible, and the blood trickled down over his face from a deep scalp wound. All was confusion for a moment; but willing hands picked him up, bore him to the cabin, where he shortly revived, although remaining somewhat dazed from the shock. As soon as it was ascertained that it was not a serious accident, the wound was bound up, and he insisted upon being left alone, or rather in company with Dot, and attention was again turned to the business in hand.

The old cabin had been utilized as a dressing-room, and Rance was acting as valet. He noted Tex shyly draw forth a pillow-case from under the bunk and pull out a shirt.

"Here, let me see that. Where did you get it? Well, I 'll be damned," he remarked, as he took it away from the embarrassed Tex and held it up to the light. It was an immaculate garment,

a work of art, plaited and tucked and finely stitched, and certainly not ready-made.

"Oh, quit yer foolishness; she made it and a half a dozen more like it. Say, Rance, you don't think she'll want me to wear this kind of thing all the time, do you? Once in a while, of course, at a wedding or a funeral maybe, but what does a man want with half a dozen? Rance, she has done nothing but measure and measure and fit and fit for two months past, until I am clear worn out. I'm damned if I'd 'a stood it from any other woman on this yere earth."

"And such is the power of love," laughed Rance. "That's the matrimonial yoke, the badge of servitude, and you're her slave. Tex, she'll wind you around her little finger, and the funny part of it is, you'll like it."

"Maybe," sighed Tex, "but I reckon she'll ease up a little after we're married." Then he braced up with the remark, "Well, derned if she isn't worth it."

A preacher of the Methodist South persuasion had been brought over from Forest City; a message came that the bride was waiting, and Rance escorted Tex to the Wakefield porch, where the ceremony was to take place and where Mrs.

Wakefield and Dot, Brant, and the editor were waiting, the rest of the camp standing around in the foreground. They were an interesting couple; Ruth the picture of happiness, and Tex beaming with pleasure, except when Rance whispered some imperative instruction, such as "Take your hands out of your pockets!"—"Let your gloves alone!"—"Hold up your head and be a man!"—"Don't paw around for the ring."

The few simple words were soon said, and the wedded pair were overwhelmed with congratulations. Rance duly claimed the privilege of kissing the bride, to which she blushingly yielded; and then came an incident that astonished and startled the on-lookers. Wakefield, who had sat at the end of the porch silent and grim as usual, walked over to the couple, extended a hand to each and said, slowly and sanely, "He is a good man, and you are a good woman; I know you will both be happy," and then retreated, taking the path to the pines. Mrs. Wakefield sprang excitedly to intercept him, but he passed her by without notice. Dot ran after him; he paused, took her hand, and they went away together, followed by the wondering glances of the assembled crowd, who realized that some change had come over the

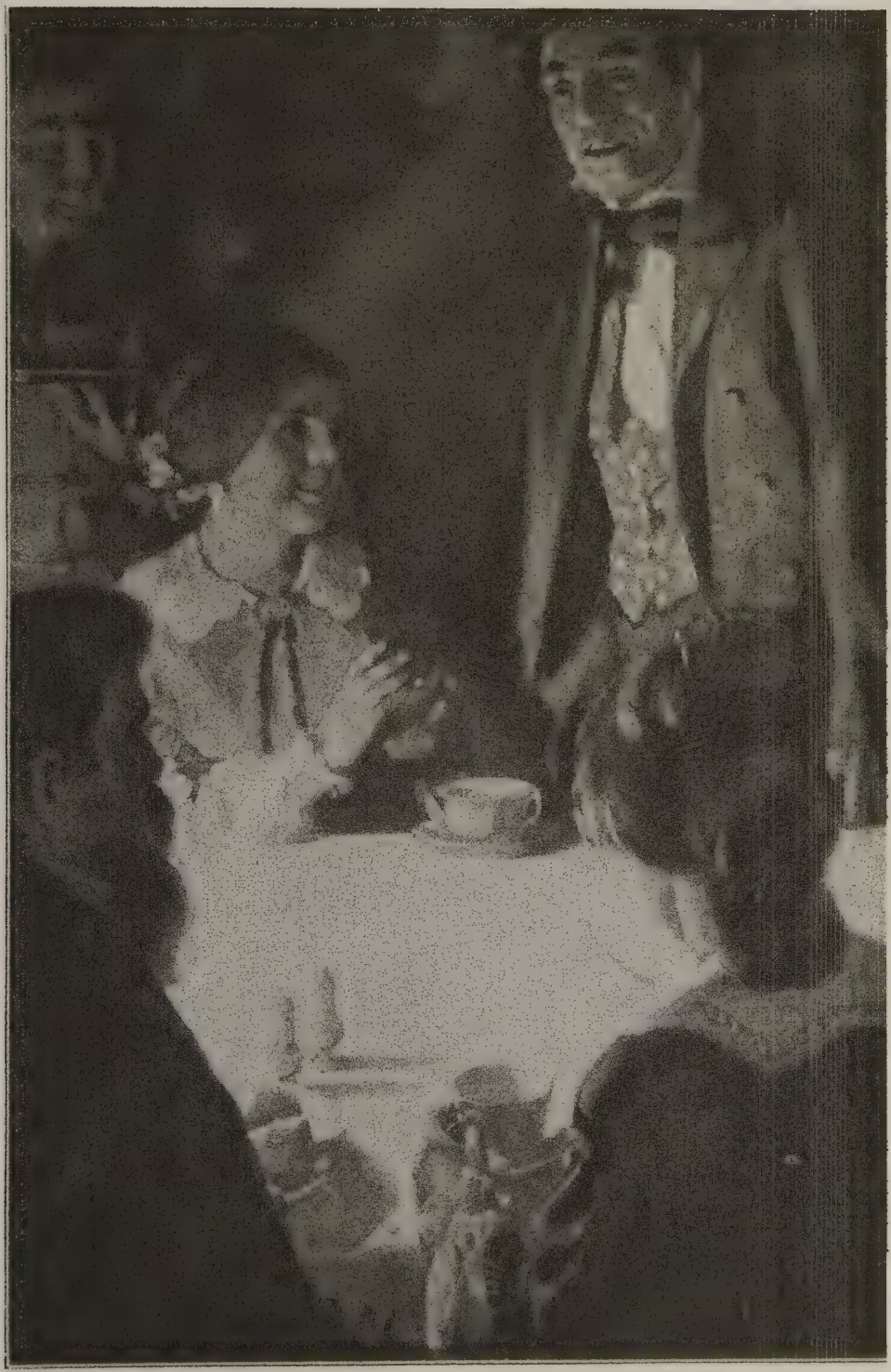
stricken man. Mrs. Wakefield broke into tears, started to follow, but was restrained by Brant. "Better let him alone for a time. Don't you see how he ignored you," he whispered, "and how he scowled at me as he went by?" and she obeyed his suggestion. It was rather a trying moment, but Mike came to the rescue. "Let's get 'em to the dinner," he urged Rance; and so they were bidden to the feast, and the father and daughter disappeared on the path over the plateau.

The old boarding-house had been transformed into a greenhouse, the walls and ceilings hidden with clusters of pine sprays, and the table set apart for the bridal party overhung with an American flag. Various appropriate sentiments were tacked to the branches, such as, "Health and Prosperity to Mr. and Mrs. Potter"; "In Union there is Happiness"; "Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow it may be your turn"; and others equally pointed.

Tong and his trained assistants loaded the tables with the toothsome viands, the bottles of wine popped as the corks were drawn, teacups were filled — there were no glasses in the place, — and all followed Rance's lead as he rose and

toasted the wedded pair. He was witty and eloquent as he dwelt on the esteem and affection in which the couple were held, feelingly lavish in invoking the blessings which they deserved, and the crowd nearly raised the roof in its vociferous endorsements of his sentiments. There were loud calls for a response, but Tex only grinned and bowed, and Ruth bubbled over with glee, urging her bashful spouse to get on his feet. "For mercy's sake, say something," she cried. "I hope you ain't struck dumb"; and Rance and Mike fairly lifted him out of his chair. Great beads of perspiration stood on his face, he awkwardly shuffled from one foot to another, and finally stammered out:

"Boys, I reckon I'd rather ride the worst mustang ever raised in Texas than try to make a speech. I haven't got Rance's gift of gab; we were raised different, and language don't come spontaneous; but I'm a powerful happy man, and I've got reasons, [here he looked lovingly at Ruth] the best of reasons, for a good woman has took pity on me and roped me into the corral. I'm out of the band of wild cattle, and I'll soon be tame enough to feed out of the hand. No more roving the plains for me, for



"As Rance rose and toasted the wedded pair."

we reckon to have a range of our own, and when we do, you 'll always find the bars down and a welcome when you ride in." Tex sat down amid the shouts of approval that followed his characteristic speech.

Then there were yells for Mike, and that worthy responded:

"You 've had the extrames, the illigant and flowery sintinces that Mr. Poole took up like a sponge when he wint to college, and the native speech that my friend Tex picked up on the border; now you want the Irish of it. I want to say to yez that ye were an uncivilized lot of haythen until Mrs. Ruth, God bless her! took pity on you and learned ye manners. She 's made a dacent camp of The City of Six; a foine wife she will make for a dacent man—although I look upon it as undacent for him to talk about being 'roped into' the marriage state, for, Hiven knows, he 's been bawling outside the fence like a sick calf for the past six months, begging to be let in; and lucky he was, for he was only a maverick, as they say in Texas. We are proud of them both and lonely we will be whin, as I understond is their future intintion, they lave the glorious mountains, the pure strames, and the

pine forests of Sierra, to take up their risidence in a cow country, where there is no hump in the earth, rivers run stagnant, and not a tree to the square mile of country. Maybe we can persuade thim to stay until the ould mine plays out. May it be a year before that happens! And now I want to tinder a little token that the byes have delegated me to presint in honor of the event. Bring them in, you saffron-colored gossoon!" Tong trotted out and returned, bearing a silver box chased with scrolls and fretwork and the initials of the bride.

Opening it, Mike picked out gingerly a massive necklace of exquisite design and workmanship, to which hung a pendant encrusted with seed pearls with a beautiful bronze pearl in the centre, the work of an East Indian jeweller, a master of his art. He handed it to Ruth, who for the first time in her life was speechless. Tears of sentiment and pleasure dimmed her eyes as she struggled to overcome her emotion, and she finally gasped out, "Oh, how good you all are!" Her heart went out to the rough men that she had bossed and scolded and cared for, and they were as pleased as a lot of happy children.

Then Tong staggered in under the burden of a Mexican saddle and bridle, the gift that had been chosen for the groom. It was one of those wonderful affairs affected by the Mexican dandy, the saddle pommel sheathed in beaten silver, and at least two hundred Mexican dollars riveted to the stamped leather coverings; the bridle reins and *reata* of the finest braided hair, and the whole outfit an equipment that would serve to turn a native *vaquero* green with envy. The miners had sent a messenger to Santa Barbara with orders and coin to get the best to be had, and he had succeeded in his mission. Again, Tex responded briefly, echoing his wife's words, "How good you are, boys!" and the formal part of the feast was over.

For men of temperate habits, they did full justice to the champagne, which sparkled and bubbled in the plebeian teacups, and was enjoyed with as much zest as if served in finest crystal goblets; they joked and bantered, and as the minutes slipped away, at last grew uproarious; at which stage the wedded pair quietly retired and sought their modest quarters, leaving the roisterers to their gayety.

There was one couple who took but little part

in the merriment. Mrs. Wakefield was distraught and dazed. The sane words of congratulation spoken by her husband, his abrupt withdrawal from the scene, and his prolonged absence with Dot, filled her heart with a vague and oppressive terror, while Brant sat as impassive and emotionless as a sphinx.

"What ails them?" asked Mike of Rance, "sure, one would think it was a funeral instid of a weddin' from the way they behave."

"Oh, I suppose she is thinking of the difference between Tex and her husband," replied Rance, as he watched Brant and the woman make their exit, although the explanation did not seem to satisfy him, and it was a perplexed and troubled gaze that followed the retreating pair. He had paid no attention to the growing intimacy between them, given it no thought; but now he remembered that they had been practically left alone, and he recalled that in his interest in the daughter he had neglected the mother and deserted his quondam friend. It came to his memory that in the past months he had noticed them occupying the porch together, and he wondered. "Oh, damn it, what a fool I am," he muttered impatiently, struggling, as he stepped

out of doors and walked toward the office, to dismiss the disloyal thoughts from his mind. He had not gained the threshold when Dot came fluttering out of the twilight, sobbing and gasping with incoherent speech.

CHAPTER XVIII

WAKEFIELD IS HIMSELF AGAIN

"OH, Rance, dear Rance!" she cried, tottering into his outstretched arms—a thrill pierced him as the affectionate call smote his ear,—"come with me quick. Father is waiting for you at the spring, and he is no more crazy than you are."

Rance stroked her hair, bent down and kissed her cheek, the first liberty he had permitted himself to take, and there was no need of words,—they both understood. As says the proverb, "Love goes where it is sent." If the summer had been a dream of paradise, this moment was the conscious awakening to its reality; and these two souls began the first chapter of the old story to which their wood wanderings had been the preface. Whatever this glimpse into each other's hearts might signify to either or both, the explanation had to be postponed as the more momentous fact of the father's changed mental condition demanded their immediate attention.

Dot had left him among the pines while she

hurried away to find Rance and her newborn joy was tempered with the fear that it was but a momentary flickering of reason and that he would have lapsed into his unbalanced state before her return. Grasping Rance's hand, which held hers with loving pressure, they sped back, to find him standing and gazing with a puzzled look toward the cluster of houses on the plateau, listening intently to the sounds of merry-making that echoed through the pines.

"What is it, Dorothea, why are you crying?" he asked as his daughter flung herself upon his breast, sobbing with joy; "Rance," turning to his partner, "what does it mean?"

"It means that you have come back to us, thank God! — our old Dean, I hope," joyfully answered Rance, who felt that indeed Wakefield had found his way to light and reason.

There was a subtle but convincing change in his voice and bearing that left no doubt in Rance's mind that he had indeed recrossed the border land to sanity and that his hallucinations had vanished. And it came to him that it was an augury of his own happiness, for although no word had been spoken, no vows pledged, he felt that Dot was his own; and with this knowl-

edge what could be more auspicious than this seeming miracle that brushed away the mists befogging Wakefield's brain — the only shadow on their mutual love?

"Tell me, Rance," implored Wakefield, "what is it? I know I have been in trouble, but how and where? When did I get back here? You met me at San Francisco when the steamer arrived; I thought we were at the hotel," and he drew his hand across his forehead as if to wipe the tangle away, and looked beseechingly at Rance and Dot for an explanation.

"Sit down, pard, and we will explain," replied Rance. "There has been a little mix-up, but I reckon it is all over with now. You 're at The City of Six with your wife and Dot, Mike and Tex and Ruth. You don't know Ruth; she 's Mrs. Tex now. There has been a wedding in the camp and that 's what is going on down there."

"My wife?" and his face took on a serious expression. "Where is she? Has anything happened to her? She was sick; I have had a bad dream; she was in trouble and was going away from me."

"Easy," said Rance soothingly, "you have got your senses back again — that 's the main thing;

your wife is all right and is waiting for you down at your house, and there will be double rejoicing when we go back. But it is better that you should know that you have been wandering away from us all for months — that is, in your mind — and taken up with a chap called Shakespeare, whom I hope you will now leave in the lurch. I am sure that the wife, Dot, Mike, and myself will be better companions."

"I don't know what you are driving at about Shakespeare," retorted Wakefield. "What has he got to do with the case?— that is, if you mean the Shakespeare who wrote the plays. I remember that we used to read them together in the old cabin before I went home, but how does he interest me, and what has he to do with my affairs?"

"He has this much to do," responded Rance, "that for six months you have flung him at our heads at all times and on all occasions; that I have been Romeo, and Orlando, Mercutio, and Hamlet; Dot has been appealed to as Rosalind, Beatrice, and Juliet; your wife as Desdemona and Imogene; and one poor fellow, who is a stranger to you, you have be-plagued with the role of Iago. You have the text by heart; you

know that, don't you?—'Like sweet bells jangled and out of tune.'"

Wakefield gave him a puzzled look. "Rance, explain it all; it seems to me that if any one is out of his mind, it is you."

Briefly, Rance went over the past, beginning with the symptoms as they first appeared on his arrival at the Bay, of Wakefield's erratic words and actions, the role that Shakespeare had played —the grief of his friends, the restoration to health of his wife, the constant attendance of Dot and himself, the fortunes of the camp, the romance of Tex and Ruth, to all of which Wakefield listened wonderingly and almost incredulously. Those days were a blank in his life, Shakespeare a myth—he could not recall a line to memory; it was as if he had awakened from a long sleep with a semi-consciousness that there had been a disturbing and oppressive nightmare, and the soul of the man wondered at the relation. It was the old, sober-minded, practical Wakefield that, hand in hand with his daughter and arm around Rance's neck, walked along the path and approached the crowded porch of the house that was his own, and yet he knew it not. His wife fluttered down the steps, struggling emo-

tions possessing her—fear, restraint, timidity, which culminated in an hysterical outburst as she was folded in his arms. To the onlookers it was a sacred moment, and with an understanding that greeting and congratulations best be deferred they made way for the couple to enter their dwelling. What passed between man and wife at this supreme moment was never revealed or referred to by either; but it is to be presumed that it was a happy reunion.

Mike, Tex, and Ruth eagerly questioned Rance and Dot and rejoiced over the strange and sudden return to them of the old Wakefield.

"Sure, if the old man has got his wits again ye can take your holiday and go a honeymooning after that cattle ranch," said Mike banteringly to Tex and the bride, who had returned to meet Wakefield. "It's a substitute he'll be, and a good one if he's the same as he was before he took up with Mr. Shakespeare. I've not much use for thim poets, anyhow. Good-night to you, Mr. and Mrs. Potter,—it's sleepy you must be, but think of the good you've done. It's many a man laves his sinses behind him when he gets married, but here you've brought a good man back to his."

The happy pair, laughing at Mike's banter, retired, and he turned to Rance for a chat; but Rance had other business in hand.

"I'll meet you at the office directly, Mike; I want to say something to Miss Wakefield."

Mike glanced at Dot's beaming face, whistled, and turned on his heel.

"Say something to Miss Wakefield, is it? What have you been doing for months past but saying something to her? Well, she's a foine girl and I do be hoping that it is the proper spache you'll whisper to her. I'm a-thinking that there will be another wedding in The City of Six before long."

What Rance said to the blushing girl has been said over and over since the creation; and yet under the stars they told each other the old story, yet so new, so novel to them, and, when they parted, Dot trembling with new-found happiness, and Rance filled with a great joy, they both disdained the belief that their experience was the most frequent and commonplace of happenings.

Leaving the girl at her door with a good-night and a salute that fully persuaded her that the place was paradise after all, Rance made his way

to the office, where Mike was awaiting him to discuss the change in affairs.

"Do you belave that the ould man and Shakespeare have bade each other good-bye?" was Mike's first question.

Rance told of Wakefield's utter forgetfulness of the immortal bard and his works, his apparent recovery, and his recollection of his old life up to a certain point, and expressed his belief that the cure was permanent.

"Sure, if the twist is out of his head, it's plased I am, for I liked him amazingly and it's wearied I have been of being called out of me name. It's Michael Cassio I've stood for to him for months gone, and it's Mike Donovan I want to be, for that will mane that he will be ready to take hold and help run the property. Marriage will spile Tex until he becomes saisoned, and that will take the winter. Let him go buy his cattle ranch and come back when love's young drame is over. But, Rance, there's one man in the camp that's not filled too full with joy. What is it ails your sporting friend Mr. Brant? A blacker-looking man I've never seen than him since Miss Dot came with the joyful news; and

the wife was n't the happiest woman in the camp by no manner of means."

"What do you mean?" demanded Rance. "Why should he look black, or the wife be unhappy?"

"I mane nothing, Rance, except what I have seen. What with your walks and your talks and your doddering around with the ould man and the girl, it 's little else you 've noticed. You all seem to have forgot that there was an interesting invalid that had some slight demand on her daughter's time as well as yersilf and her crazy father; if you did n't, Brant did, and it 's his best he has been doing to console her for the want of attintion she 's had from the rest of you."

"You 're not hinting, Mike, that there is anything wrong — you can 't mean that?" exclaimed Rance.

"I nather said it nor hinted it," retorted Mike, "but I do know that they have been planted on the porch together every day for a long time past, that the camp 's been talking, and I broke one man's head for his impidence. I 'm saying nothing, Rance, except to my frind, and that 's you; but Mr. Brant is not overly plased with the developments of this night; and the words

that he said to her, that I could n't help hearing, don't have the right sort of a sound. 'Kape your sinses and don't betray yersilf, darlint.' His darlint, and she a married woman! He should have a hint that it is glad to see his back we will be."

Rance was startled both at the earnestness of his friend and the seeming truthfulness of his remarks. Wrapped up in his own romance, he recalled that he had seen but little of Mrs. Wakefield or Brant for some time and had paid no attention to either of them. He was aware that Dot was prejudiced against the intruder and had shunned him, and that Wakefield himself had held Brant in utter detestation. This he had attributed to one of his mad freaks. Now he recalled a hundred trivial circumstances that in the light of Mike's words gave some justification to them, although, after all, the mere open intimacy was no proof of any wrongdoing, and so he argued with Mike and to himself; and Mike acquiesced, adding,

"Anyway, the ould man is not poetry-struck any longer and it 's able he is to look after his own affairs. I don't like your frind very well mesilf. He 's as cold-hearted as the snow in the

gulch; and while he's straight enough in a business way, I would as soon have a snake for a partner. Mind ye, Rance, the man that can't make frinds with a dog, — give him the go-by. Did ye ever see Jack wag his tail or put on a glad look when Brant Phillips was by? Ye did not."

Jack was the dog, almost forgotten in the story, whose rescue had introduced Brant to Rance's acquaintance. He had grown plump and lazy in his new home and by his amiable and persuasive ways had won the affection of the whole camp. Even Ruth tolerated and had been known to pet him, but he had singled out Mike and Rance as the two to whom he owed allegiance and gave them a devoted loyalty. He was lying in front of the office fire during the conversation and seemed to know that he was called on the witness stand, for he got up and thrust his nose into Mike's fist and gazed at him with his intelligent eyes, as if to sustain Mike's charge.

"It's a good judge of character you are, Jack, and it's no use ye have for the 'sport'; but by that same token ye're an ungrateful baste, as he did just as much to protect ye as Mr. Rance. It's a fact I'm telling ye, Rance; coax as he may with frindly words or what else, it's not a bite

that Jack will take from his hand, or a wag of the tail he'll give him in spite of what he may do. Well, never mind me suspicions! The ould man is himself again and that will end the foolishness, anyway. It's a disagreeable subject; and I'm thinking ye have a more pleasant one occupying your mind. Rance, a nicer girl never trod down a wild flower on the mountain; and I hope I'm not too pravious in extinding me congratulations. I love ye as if ye were me own bye, and I want to see ye as happy as ye desarve to be."

A grip of the hand was Rance's reply, and he did not deny that Mike had guessed their secret.

It had been an eventful day in The City of Six and its principals were stirred to the depths by the various happenings. There was but one who did not fully partake in the added sum of happiness that had come to so many, and she, who should have been the most pleased of all, sat by her husband's side, wondering what the future had in store for her.

CHAPTER XIX

HALF-FORMED PLANS

THE day succeeding the wedding the camp resumed its wonted routine. The day shift partook of their early breakfast with much discussion and comment on the events of the previons day.

"It about broke even," sarcastically remarked a cynical miner, "one man came to his senses and another lost his," it being the speaker's view that marriage was indicative of a weak mind; but this met with general rebuke, as it was considered a reflection on Mrs. Ruth.

"Don't fool yourself with any such idea, young man," retorted another of the crowd; "there is nothing looney about Tex. It 's good judgment he showed when he persuaded the landlady to share his fortunes, and you will think so when you change to China grub. I wonder if Wakefield has really gotten over his looney streak; if he has, there will be another boss to reckon with, and it won't be at the mine only. I should n't be surprised if Black Brant [the

nickname bestowed on Phillips by the men] got a notice to find some other porch to loaf on."

The chatter showed that the camp had noted the intimacy and were inclined to gossip, but the entrance of Rance and Mike put an end to it and the men dispersed to their work.

"I'm as nervous as a cat," said Mike to his comrade, "and it's a dread I have of meeting the ould man this morning. If he misnames me 'Michael Cassio,' who you tell me was no Irishman at all but a furriner from Italy, then I'll despair of him."

"Let us hope for the best," laughed Rance. "Here he comes with Miss Dorothea, and she would n't be smiling like that if he had gone back on himself again."

"Miss Dorothea, is it? How formal ye are this morning! But ye have an eye for the smile on her face. I trust ye will never see it otherwise."

With this pious wish Mike flung the door open and greeted the pair.

"It's as pretty as a mountain quail ye're looking, Miss Dorothea"; and to the old man, shaking Wakefield's proffered hand, "Are ye finding yersilf all right this day?"

It needed no assurance that he was. The va-

cant, listless look had disappeared, and the animation and evident pleasurable interest with which he met his comrades betokened that he had come to his own again. He was quite overcome with emotion, for although his memory was at fault, — almost a complete blank for the past six months,— he realized that his wits had been wandering, and the joy of recovery was tempered with the apprehension that he might again cross the border-land.

"I 'm all right, Mike, and know what has happened. Dot has told me all about it, but the cause of it all is a mystery. There have been moments when I knew you and I would try to tell you that I was not crazy; then you would fade away out of my mind and all sorts of queer fancies take possession of me. Last night suddenly, while sitting with Dot at the spring, the cloud seemed to roll away, my old life came back to me as clear as the day I left the camp, and although I was confused and puzzled and had to grope to get my bearings, I realized that I was back in The City of Six; and then Rance came with Dot. Well, you know the rest."

Standing in the doorway looking at the surroundings, he continued:

"Mike, this is not the place that I left behind last spring. Then it was only a couple of cabins, now it is a town. Have they struck new diggings besides our old claim?"

"It's a lot you have to see," answered Mike. "There is no new diggings except the ould one. You're a man of property and you are making money while you slape. It's a thousand dollars a day the mine is good for, and there's many a day's work in it yet. Get your breakfast and we will look it over. Is the wife a-coming? I'm thinking that Mr. and Mrs. Potter will have a late meal this morning."

Dot answered that her mother was not feeling well and that she would take up some tea and toast to her later, and they sat down to the table. Tong had prepared an appetizing meal and was bustling around, bringing in various dishes and watching to see if full justice was done to the contents.

"This is my successor," said Rance, "a pupil of Mrs. Ruth, and, as she has abdicated, the cock of the walk henceforth."

Tong grinned. "Mistel Lance, he likee joke; allee same he belly good man. Now, me kitchen boss, me chief cook. Missy Luth, she go

away, I get hundled dolla hap a month. She teachee me; allee men likee my glub." With which tribute to his own talents Tong retired to the kitchen to boss his two assistants, Chinamen whom he had brought to the camp to partake of its fatness.

"And Mrs. Potter, what of her? She seems to be quite a new acquisition and quite an important member of the community," queried Wakefield.

Rance briefly related the circumstances attending Ruth's coming, her idiosyncrasies, her good heart, her enslavement of Tex, culminating in the wedding of the previous day, a date promising to be still more notable in the annals of the camp by the disappearance of Wakefield's malady. The relation was brought to a close by the coming of Mr. and Mrs. Potter to their morning meal.

They were welcomed by just one little jibe from Mike. "It's late ye are to breakfast this morning, Tex, and you that were always so early a riser"; but this passed unnoticed in the hearty greetings between Tex and "the old man." It was really pathetic when the fact was taken into consideration that they had met daily for months

past, but all the members of the party had the tact not to allude to it. Then Tex introduced Mrs. Potter,—a softened, blooming Ruth, who in her new-found happiness, was pleased that another wife, as she believed, was rejoicing in the return to her arms of an estranged loved one.

Learning of Mrs. Wakefield's indisposition, Ruth insisted on preparing the tea and toast and going with Dot to the house, leaving the men to discuss the situation. As Mike pulled out a plug of tobacco, cut off a pipeful and deliberately filled and lighted it, Wakefield regarded him enviously and finally broke out,

"Mike, have you another one? It seems as if I had n't had a smoke for a year."

"I 'll get you mine," said Tex. "I have quit."

"Since when?" retorted Rance. "You were smoking yesterday."

Tex turned red and stammered. "Well, you see, Ruth reckons it is n't good for my health, says it 's a wasteful habit, and she does n't like the smell of an old pipe. Maybe she 's right," regarding Mike wistfully as he blew out clouds of vapor from his *dhudeen*.

"Tex," said Rance solemnly, "you don't mean that you are going to lie down this early in the

game. I've puffed cigars under her nose ever since I brought her to the camp, and she never sniffed once. Insist on your privileges or you are a goner. The next thing, she will make you put on a clean shirt every morning, forbid you associating with Mike and me for fear it will hurt your morals; in fact, Tex, she will wear the breeches, and there is an end to your liberty."

"Oh, shut up," retorted Tex. "What do you know about women, anyway? Smoking gives her a headache, and you don't suppose I am mean enough to make her sick, but—," here his good resolutions melted in the air, "I can smoke outdoors, she can't have any objection to that." Then away he went to the cabin, returning quickly with two black clay pipes and a slab of blackstrap, and shortly the incense of the weed loaded the atmosphere. Tex breathed a sigh of relief and mentally resolved that he would make a stand for the continuance of the habit; Wakefield declared that a whiff of tobacco was the one thing needed to complete his contentment; Mike regarded them both quizzically, and Rance, who had taken to cigars, flicked the ashes off the end of one and settled down to posting Wakefield on the growth and progress of The City of Six

during the summer, a story to which the Dean eagerly listened.

"You don't know how anxious I am to get to the old work again. I have not had a contented moment since I turned my back on it last spring," Wakefield said. "Maybe I 'm muscle-bound, but I want to grasp a pick once more; you know I did pretty good work in Slug Canyon."

"It 's no pick-handling you 'll do," retorted Mike. "We 're hiring men to do the hard work; there 's ninety of 'em living here at prisint. If you 're going to stay here, you 'll officiate as a boss and help me out wid me duties. I 'm expecting to lose our frind Tex, who 's draming of ranches and cattle and is going down into the cow counties to take up with the malaria and mosquitoes. Virgin goold don't seem to have any attraction for him at prisint."

"Yes, but I 'm coming back," replied Tex; "we are only going for a vacation and to make an investment in a business that I like and was brought up to."

"Yes, and you 'll be needing another vacation by the time you 've found it, and more money to put into it. Bafe is a good thing to ate, and

maybe it's a good thing to raise; but I want none of it, so long as the mountains are full of goold to be had for the digging. Anyhow, the ould man has more sinse than to be longing after the delights of a flat country with only one tree to the square mile, and that a dwarf."

"I like the mountains," said Wakefield, "and I have made up my mind to stay; that is—" and he paused, sighed, and looked meditatively toward his house, "my wife don't seem to be satisfied. It's strange, for she is a well woman and admits that the mountains have cured her. She says she is lonesome, although not for the old home back East. She wants to get away from here, travel in foreign countries; poor little woman, I guess my affliction has been a hard trial for her and given her a distaste for the place. However, it may wear off now that I seem to be all right again; and I am, ain't I, boys?" turning to his comrades for a confirmation of his belief in his recovery.

They assured him that he was, Rance and Mike exchanging significant glances over his wife's discontent; and then Mike proposed that Wakefield should accompany him on a trip through the mine that he might note the develop-

ments and realize the importance and wealth of the property.

Rance had no inclination to make an underground exploration that day and was content to leave Wakefield to Mike's care. The revelation that had come to him the previous evening of the state of Dot's feelings and incidentally of his own, possessed him with joy, and the memory of the loving caress that seemed to be the culmination and natural expression of the girl's happiness over the return of her father's reason still thrilled him as he recalled it. Now he knew that their close association during the summer, their mutual guardianship of the father, their rambles under the pines, and the sense of keen enjoyment from their companionship, marked the budding of an enduring affection, and he wondered that he had delayed his happiness so long. Yet their attitude had been rather that of friendly comrades than lovers, two grown-up children, happy in what the wood gods offered them and content for the time with these gifts. The kiss which he had given Dot when she flung herself into his arms had not been resented, and the giving and taking had brought Rance on the feet of his understanding. On Mike's shoulders had fallen the burden of manag-

ing the property, and although Rance had been informed and consulted he had not interfered. Dame Fortune had been kind, and without effort he was growing rich, was already independent in a modest way, and his future was secure with ordinary care. He had entertained half-formed plans to be carried out when his inclination prompted. He could return to the old plantation, to his people and his birthplace, and assume a position to which his social standing entitled him, and that without drawing on the family resources; but somehow the prospect did not appeal to him. His horizon had broadened, his aspirations did not include social distinction. Like all the rest who came under the climatic witchery of the foothills, the Sierras held him as in a spell.

He had thought that after he had paid a dutiful visit to the old home, he might return, take up his residence at San Francisco, study law, go into politics, or play the dilettante and live on his income; but there had been no necessity for definitely settling the question.

There had been moments when his conscience smote him for his lack of ambitious purpose, although not sufficiently to impel him to more vigorous action. Now, however, there had come into his life a new condition. Doubting not that

Dot had given herself to him, he pondered seriously upon what the change meant. The sylvan life had its charm, Nature beckoned and rewarded those who crept close to her breast; but as "Benedick, the married man," there would come duties and responsibilities that must needs divorce him from his paganism.

These thoughts flitted through his mind, as he sat on the steps awaiting Dot's return and rather impatient of her delay. He did not know of the tumult in the girl's brain, the self-accusation of forwardness, the lack of maidenly modesty with which she charged herself in her involuntary betrayal of her feelings. What would he think of her literally throwing herself into his arms? And yet she remembered the quick response and did not doubt her lover. Oh no! she would not seek him; how could she meet him in the daylight, although the sun shone brighter, the birds sang sweeter — and vowing that she would not, her feet trod the path that led her to him. Hours to be remembered forever! As they bent their steps over the old trail, what they said, the vows they pledged, of what consequence? Happy pair, to whom the present was unalloyed delight, and the future promised no terrors; for their love made them unafraid.

CHAPTER XX

A GAMBLER IN LOVE

WAKEFIELD'S interested examination of the mine, his grasp of the methods employed, and his comprehension of the details and improvements indicated beyond doubt his complete restoration to sanity. Under Mike's guidance he noted the well-timbered tunnel piercing the mountain a distance of eight hundred feet, the prospecting drifts, the methodical breasting out of the gravel, the drilling and blasting that broke up the cemented mass, the track and cars that had displaced the primitive wheelbarrow, the gang of thirty men who toiled through the eight-hour shift and then gave place to an equal number.

"It 's three gangs we keep at it; the work niver stops, day nor night," Mike informed his companion. "Four dollars a day they get and their board, and we have the pick of miners for that pay. It is n't like the old days when we rocked out Slug Canyon and turned up our noses at anything less than an ounce a day apiece. There are a few good claims left yit, but they are mostly down on the river or in the deep diggings along

the ridge. The bars and the gulches are worked out; river mining is uncertain; and it takes capital to exploit the dead river channels. How much d'ye think are our daily expinses? Six hundred dollars, divil a ciut less. I'll show ye what the yield is when we wash up directly. It's a foine property, not a better one from Moore's Flat to La Porte, and there's dozens of 'em in those forty miles; and if the channel would only keep straight it 's years it would last, but — spake low — I have me doubts. Did you mind the bend in the last hundred feet in the tunnel? If that keeps up, we'll soon be running along the side of the mountain instid of into it; and that manes that she will ind up in the canyon beyond. At the worst, however, we have a thousand feet, and that's good for a year. Besides, I have taken up the ground on the other side of the canyon, have four min adrifting, and it prospects pretty well. If she jumps, we'll jump wid it. If ye have grasped the lay of it all and ye want to study it, we'll go out and clane up the sluices. That's the mainspring of all of the works."

A long line of sluice boxes had taken the place of the now obsolete "Long Tom," and Wakefield watched the process with absorbing interest.

"It's only the first four we clane up each day, the rist of them we lave for Saturday; and mind ye, there's a watchman here day and night to prevint somebody else from relieving us of the job. Since the Chinamen have got so thick around the country, it's not safe to lave yer sluices alone; they're born sluice-robbers and there are also white men who make an aisy living in that kind of work. There was a China funeral in Chinatown three weeks ago, and our watchman furnished the corpse; and there's a sport limping around Downieville at the prisint time by raison of a few buckshot that he gathered one dark night retrating down Slug Canyon. Gold is mighty timpting and it's close chances they'll take to pick up a few hundred dollars. And that ain't all, ould man. Niver a day passes that we don't lose more or less out of the mine. Ye can't stop it. The gold is coarse, a three or four-dollar nugget is aisy stowed away; ye can't search 'em and ye're not surprised when ye hear of one of yer men selling a lot of dust over in Forest City or elsewhere that ye know came out of yer own property. The rogues and thaves one has to contind with laves ye to belave that there is little honesty in this

wicked worrld," and Mike sighed as he hinted at the dishonesty of his fellow-men.

Removing the riffles one by one, and carefully washing the gravel down to the end of the fourth box, the water was turned off and the few pans of dirt to which it was reduced removed for the last process, the panning out. Wakefield noted the glittering particles sifted through the dirt and black sand, the numerous small nuggets which Mike picked up and put to one side, and the finer gold, the size of grains of wheat, which were finally separated from the gravel. There was a goodly amount; Mike guessed it at fourteen hundred dollars, and he added:

"That 's what comes out of the mine every day in the week, except Saturday, when we wash up the whole string and get about a thousand dollars more. That 's the fine gold that 's carried by the upper riffles and gets caught by the quicksilver in the lower boxes. Well, ould man, are ye going to stay wid me this winter? I 'll not lave it mesilf so long as it pays, but it takes an aigle eye and a lot of attintion to kape it running properly. We got along all right till Tex lost his head and his heart to the widdy; and now nothing will do him

but he must prance away to the lowlands. Rance is a foine bye, but a poor boss, and he 's got above it since he threw up cooking and went to meandering around the woods with the birds and others — of which I 'm thinking ye 'll know more later — rather than be doing honest worrk that would aise up on his pard."

To which Wakefield responded that it was both his inclination and intention to remain at the mine although he could not decide at the moment.

"The fact is, Mike," he said, "my wife seems to be discontented, and intimates that she does not want to live in The City of Six through the dreary winter. From what she tells me, I must have been a trial to her since she has been here. Out of my head and she ill, it 's got her into a nervous state and she fears that I will have a relapse. It 's a strange thing, Mike, this blank that came into my life and it frightens me when I think of it. Oh, well! it 's gone; God grant it won't come back."

"It will not," said Mike stoutly. "Take me advice and let books alone; there 's little good in 'em, and this fellow Shakespeare with whom you 've been colloguing for the while past, is misleading. Belike, ye don't remimber miscalling me

Michael Cassio, and me a born Donovan. Help me with the mine, put yer mind on yer property, and ye'll have nather time nor inclination for aught else. Go aisy for a week or two until ye get the hang of things. What with the worry and sorrow, it's natural yer wife should be low-spirited. Take me advice, ould man: there are good saddle horses in the camp—have a jaunt with her over the ridge. There's a lot doing, and there's towns now where there were only cabins before you wint away, and there's mining being done that will surprise ye. Make a week of it; and if Miss Dot goes along, maybe you can persuade Rance to go wid ye." Mike's eyes twinkled as he made this last suggestion. "A nice fellow is that same Rance, and I'm of the opinion that yer daughter has the same way of thinking."

"What do you mean, Mike?" asked Wakefield, startled by Mike's implied hint.

"I mane nothing and I know nothing except that if I had a daughter it's mighty proud I would be to have Rance as a son-in-law; and I'm no prophet if you don't have the chance."

"Why, she is only a child, Mike," retorted Wakefield, knitting his brows over the implication, but not at all displeased with the prospect.

He had an abiding affection for his young partner, and would be more than satisfied if Mike's prediction should come to pass; but he had not realized that his daughter had grown into womanhood, nor did he know that during his blank days he had been the excuse for the intimacy that had ripened into love.

"Child, is it?" laughed Mike. "No doubt you think she's still a baby, that foine slip of a gurl that do be a woman. But I'm thrusting me nose in what is none of me business, and Rance will not be thanking me for me impident interference. You need n't be telling him what I've said, or the bye will damn me for a blundering Irishman putting in me fist where there is no occasion."

Wakefield promised, and also agreed to take into consideration the suggested trip to the adjacent camps.

"I can't go wid ye mesilf," explained Mike, "as I must n't lave the mine alone that lingth of time; but there's yersilf and the mistress, Mr. and Mrs. Potter (a slice of the honeymoon for thim), Miss Dot and Rance of course, and maybe Black Brant. That would be a nice party and only one odd one in it."

"Black Brant, who is he?" asked Wakefield.

"Who is he?" echoed Mike. "He's Iago, the villain ye've been a-scowling at and refusing to spake to for no ind of time. He's a reformed sport, a convarted faro daler that's took up wid mining for raisons. He's no frind of mine, although I've trated him dacently and given him the benefit of me advice in his new game. He was at the wedding, but I have n't seen him since. It's the dog Jack that's responsible for him, although the dog is no frind of his aither. Rance will tell you the story. There comes your daughter a-flying down the hill, and I'll be scolded for monopolizing your company."

Dot announced that dinner was waiting, and as Mike predicted, upbraided him for spending the long forenoon in the mine.

"Mr. Poole and I have been waiting for you for hours," she said, "and even Tex and Ruth have forgotten their own affairs long enough to ask where you are."

"Mr. Poole, is it? How polite we're getting! And who is Mr. Poole?" sarcastically inquired Mike. "You'll be calling me Mr. Donovan nixt."

"Oh no, I will not. You are the boss — even Mrs. Ruth admits that, and" — making a mock

courtesy, "we will call you the manager. Come along! It's a glorious day and I'm gloriously hungry," and taking her father's hand, she led the way up the trail to the boarding-house, where the others were waiting. Mrs. Wakefield was among them and met her husband, but it was a shy and awkward greeting on both sides. He was not demonstrative, nor she affectionate. Perhaps their long years of married life had dulled their emotions, although to the lookers-on it did seem that the wife was singularly unmoved by the change in her husband's mental condition.

The afternoon was passed in mutual consultation as to the future. Tex and his bride were determined on a visit to the plains; and Mrs. Wakefield intimated that she desired a change of scene if her husband's interests permitted, and appealed to Dot to add her persuasion to that end.

"If your father prefers the mountains," she suggested, "we can pass the winter in San Francisco and return in the spring. This barbarous place is unbearable."

Wakefield, at this hint of a separation, looked at her with surprise, but made no reply; at a sign

from Rance he followed him up the path to the spring, where they sat down together.

"Wakefield," began Rance, with a little embarrassment, "I have a great favor to ask of you, and I trust you will see your way to grant it. The fact is," he blurted out, "I want Dot for my own; I think she is willing. Can you give her to me?"

Wakefield looked into Rance's honest eyes, and his own dimmed.

"I'm sure it never entered my mind," he huskily replied. "I haven't had much mind of late until the past twenty-four hours, but I know that you would be my choice above all men. It's another blessing I have to thank God for," and the strong man wrung Rance's hand with an unwonted emotion. Then he asked Rance for a rehearsal of all that had happened since his mind failed him; and his friend gave him a full account, including the loving care and devoted attention of Dot.

"And my wife?" queried Wakefield. "She also has cared for me?"

"Oh, of course," replied Rance, "but you must remember that she was a sick woman when she

arrived and has hardly had the strength to play the attendant, knowing it was not necessary as you were in good hands."

"Maybe it's because I am gathering my wits slowly," responded Wakefield, "but I am oppressed with the feeling that something — my mental condition possibly — has put up some sort of a barrier between us. Not that I have any tangible cause for the belief, but I cannot escape the thought that there is an estrangement, a coldness for which I cannot account. I have been a trial — that is a fact."

Rance pooh-poohed the suggestion, insisting that his friend was a little morbid and that matters would right themselves in the near future. "If there is any foundation for it, the cause has been our own selfishness," he explained. "She has been too much alone. Dot and I have devoted our waking hours to you, Ruth has been busy about her own affairs, and the rest of those with whom she could associate were looking after the mine and its workings. Naturally, being ill and out of sorts, she has keenly felt our apparent neglect and doubtless silently resented it."

"It may be," responded Wakefield. "She burst into tears last night and told me that she had had

but one friend in the camp, and that was a person that I had never heard of before. Who is this Phillips to whom she seems to owe such a debt of gratitude? According to Mike, he is not the sort of a man that one would choose for a family friend."

With some confusion and inward upbraiding, Rance related to his comrade the circumstances that had brought about their meeting and his subsequent introduction to the camp.

"He is a gentleman," he insisted, "a reformed gambler, if you please, but of good birth and breeding. He abandoned his profession from sheer disgust and under my own and Mike's advice took up mining. His property is just across the ridge, and at my invitation he made The City of Six his abiding-place. The truth is," remorsefully continued Rance, "he must have found it pretty dull here of late. You were such pleasant company that I neglected him, and he has been left to his own resources. When I come to think of it, your wife and he, ignored by the rest of us, have established a friendship, and that probably accounts for her reference to him as her only friend. Give her time, old man, and don't go around pulling a

long face. Cheer up, and take my word for it there is no one in this round world who rejoices in your recovery more than she."

"Well, she takes a queer way of showing it," grumbled Wakefield. "Don't think I'm jealous—that would be ridiculous; but where is the fellow, anyway? Has he run away because I have got my senses?"

Rance explained that Phillips had been at the wedding and was present when Dot brought the tidings of her father's sanity. He probably felt that he would be out of place at the family reunion, and had saddled his horse and gone over to Hepsidam or an adjacent camp.

"Don't bother, he will turn up when he judges that things have settled down to the old basis."

"Why should I bother?" retorted Wakefield. "I'm sure I have no interest in the man or inclination to meet him, except a curiosity to know the person whom my wife proclaims as her only friend. And by the way, Mike suggests that we all take a vacation and ride over to the towns on the Middle Fork. He tells me that they have grown into big camps since I saw them, and I would like to get a glimpse at them. I intend, as soon as I get my bearings, to get back into

harness. Mike insists that he needs me, and it will be pleasant to take up the old work again. If the wife wants city life or travel, I will consent, but without me. There is too much at stake here, what with Tex going off on his honeymoon, for us to leave the burden wholly on Mike's shoulders. Besides, it is my duty. I've had my share for a time without contributing my help, and I will stay with it until I make up for my idleness."

Rance suggested that there was no immediate necessity for a decision and heartily agreed to the proposed visit to the neighboring towns.

"We can take the ladies along; there are good hotels at Forest City and Moore's Flat, and we will get together and talk it over this evening. And then," added Rance, "I am of the opinion that Mr. and Mrs. Poole to be—doesn't that sound well?—will have a taste of civilization. I want to take Dot back to my old home and present her to my own people, and if mother-in-law—do you think she will like the title?—will favor us with her company, what could be better planned than such a journey? You will stay and pile up wealth while we are having a jolly trip. That is the solution of it all, de-

pending, of course, as to whether she will accept me as a son-in-law. Dot is to break the news to her and get her consent."

Wakefield cheered up visibly and agreed that Rance's plan was a good one, although not relishing the prospective separation from his wife, and they started to walk back to camp.

"By Jove, there she is now!" cried Rance. "What is she doing up on the ridge trail?" pointing to Mrs. Wakefield, who had just emerged from the chaparral where the path wound down the crest, and was slowly returning to camp. They waited for her at the foot of the hill, where she joined them and walked in their company to the house. She was silent, abstracted, and responded to their talk in monosyllables; and they failed to note, as she shaded her eyes from the rays of the declining sun, that they were tear-stained and swollen, traces which she removed with cold water as soon as she entered the house.

"I wonder if Dot has told her," puzzled Rance. "What the mischief has got into the woman? She's a wet blanket on us all." Then Mike beckoned him to one side.

"Rance, there is trouble ahead, unless we

interfere. Baldy Brown came over the trail from Kanaka Creek this afternoon and told me he met the old man's wife and Black Brant, sitting out under the rock on top of the hill, he wid his arm around her waist, and she a-crying and wringing her hands. I have my suspicions that he is coaxing her to her own divilment, the dirty hound."

Rance's hot blood boiled as he comprehended the situation.

"By God! I'll kill him like a dog if he means her harm, the infernal scoundrel! And I will follow him to hell to do it!"

"Be quiet, me son, be cool and don't be doing anything rash. I've told Baldy to kape his teeth shut and his tongue inside. We will have no scandal until there is a good reason for it. You'll not interfere,—I have me way of taking care of the baste widout you're mixing in it."

It was with difficulty that Rance controlled himself, especially when he considered his new relation to the family. It came to him that Brant Phillips, infatuated with the woman, had taken advantage of Wakefield's affliction to estrange her from her husband. Wakefield's recovery had disconcerted his plans, and he was

no doubt using all his persuasive powers to separate the pair. This accounted for the wife's embarrassment and her attitude toward her husband, and for Phillips's avoidance of the place since the night previous. Mike's informant, who had not been observed, had noted that Phillips remounted his horse and rode away in the opposite direction. With turmoil in his mind, Rance managed to command his feelings, although mentally vowing the direst vengeance.

There was a gathering in the boarding-house that evening, and Wakefield, acting on Mike's suggestion, proposed the little journey along the ridge. To their surprise, Mrs. Wakefield gave an eager acceptance. She had recovered her spirits and, notwithstanding appearances, Rance was almost persuaded that his suspicions were unfounded. Later, when she quietly told him that Dot had pleaded his cause and that she was only too happy to give her consent, he felt ashamed that he should have so misjudged her, and was almost convinced that it was all a mistake. Anyway, he would be prudent and not precipitate trouble by acting on what after all might be false conclusions. He blamed himself for the situation. He had been so absorbed in the daugh-

ter that he had forgotten the mother. Now he could see how lonely she must have been; her protector alienated, the daughter, who had been her confidante and constant companion, transferring her attentions to her father; naturally she had craved sympathy and without any thought of wrongdoing had accepted it when proffered. But, and Rance gritted his teeth, there was no excuse for the man who had taken advantage of the hospitality of the camp, to play so base a role; no, he would be held to a strict account. With vengeful thoughts he sought Mike at the office and unfolded to him his determination of at once seeking out Brant and inflicting summary punishment.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," Mike emphatically declared "I'm convinced that there is no harm done although there is no telling what might have happened if the ould man had stayed off his head much longer. This man Phillips was an idle man and she an idle woman, and ye know the proverb about the divil finding worrk for that sort. I know ye, Rance. Ye're that hot-blooded that nothing will satisfy ye but to wipe him off the face of the earth. Ye can't assassinate him. Ye're sure to quarrel, and thin,

don't forget, he's quick on the trigger; and where will it ind? Ye need n't flash up, av coorse ye 're not as cool as the sport; and, me bye," — here Mike threw his arm around Rance's neck, "we all love ye. Even Mrs. Ruth is as fond of ye as a dacent married woman can be and ye do be wanting to make Miss Dot a widdy before she is a wife. Lave it to me. I 'll ride over to Hepsidam in the morning, have a quiet talk with the gintleman, and I 'm of the belafe that he 'll trouble none of us any more."

By dint of Mike's persuasive eloquence, Rance allowed himself to be persuaded, it being understood that he was not to seek a quarrel unless Mike's mission failed.

"Take no care of me," enjoined the warm-hearted Irishman. "The worrds I will use will be convincing, but he 'll take no offince. How can he, when I explain to him that his prisence in The City of Six is regarded as no longer necessary on account of a prejudice the dog Jack and the cook have against him? He 'll take the hint without a kick, and that will be the ind of the trouble."

Mike carried out his programme and must have acted diplomatically, as he reported to

Rance the next morning that it had all been satisfactorily settled.

"I said to him that the ould man, having come out of his trance, would naturally object to any intrusion, and that the wife was so happy over it that she would n't have time to entertain any one not connected intimately with the family. You should have seen the black look he gave me when I said it, but the scoundrel was that cool about it that he tould me he had made up his mind to the same and that he was going to sell out if he could, lave the mountains and perhaps the State. It was thin, Rance, that I did a stroke of business wid him, for I agreed to buy the Hepsidam property for the money he has put into it; and I 'm sure I 've got a bargain, which you can all share in if so minded. Now take me tip, coort the mother as well as the daughter. Grateful she will be for your attintions and proud that ye are coming into the family. Another thing, me bye. I hear they are going to have races over at Moore's Flat next week,—a lively camp is that same Moore's Flat. Sure, there will be a lot of fun and divilment, for money is plenty on the ridge, and the byes are anxious to scatter it. Fix up your party, and

I'll send a message over to a frind of mine I have there to engage rooms for ye all at the hotel. It's the same frind, Lon Hanchett, I want you to know. He's the boss miner of the camp, a big-hearted young feller, barely of age and yet the owner of the two richest mines on the Flat."

Rance was pleased to hear of Mike's success in his mission and, although still resentful over Phillips's actions, was glad to get rid of him so easily, never doubting that this would be the end of the trouble.

The excursion was duly debated and decided upon. Ruth hesitated at first,—she was fearful of the effect it might have on the morals of her husband.

"He's one of the best men, Rance," she declared, "but he never had any early training, and he has grown up that wild that I'm afraid he will never steady down into a peaceful man."

Rance laughed as he bethought himself of the pipe episode, and then took occasion to give her a little advice.

"Don't get angry, Ruth, but take my word for it, too much molly-coddling will spoil the best of us. Tex has run free all his life and it has not hurt him any. He loves you and he

thinks you are perfection. He has formed his habits, and you can't teach an old dog new tricks — pardon me for the comparison. Don't put the curb on him too tight. You've cut off his smoking, and he's trying to quit to please you. Bye and bye he'll sneak off into the mine or somewhere else, fill his pipe and smoke, and while he's doing it will feel aggrieved that you have deprived him of the comfort. He hates starched shirts, although he will wear them because you want him to and they will be a yoke. Even I, who was born to them, despise them. Drive him with a loose rein, and you can guide him in any road you please."

Ruth bridled a bit at what struck her as presumptuous, and then perhaps a vision of the past came to her. Her first husband she had thought a manly fellow when they were married; there had been few quarrels; he had just seemed to lose spirit and had turned weak and shiftless. He had basely wronged her, as she passionately declared, without cause or provocation. Had she pursued the right system? With all her masterfulness, Ruth was a sensible woman and capable of learning a lesson.

"Much you know about marriage," she re-

torted. "Why, your wife, — if you ever get one,—will twist you around her little finger; but I 'm obliged for the counsel."

She departed to find Tex and note whether her discipline had had any bad effects. Rance laughed heartily and later called Mike's attention to Tex who after dinner sprawled on the porch emitting clouds of smoke from his pipe, and Ruth close by his side, betraying no annoyance.

"Hivins, Rance, would ye belave it? And she not telling him what a filthy habit it is! By this and that I see Tex has a happy life forninst him."

CHAPTER XXI

SPORTSMEN AND SPORTING

IT was quite an imposing cavalcade that left The City of Six on Sunday morning. Moore's Flat, its destination, was some fifteen miles to the south, half-way up the mountain-side from the Middle Fork of the Yuba River. It, with its companion camps, Woolsey's and Orleans Flat, had become famous for the richness and extent of the gold deposits. The channel of the ancient river, the same that had been discovered at The City of Six, had been found here with like characteristics; in fact, it had been traced and was in this Fall of 1853 being worked in sections from La Porte on the north to You Bet and Red Dog in Nevada County on the south, a distance of over sixty miles; and before it was exhausted, gold to the value of over two hundred million dollars was taken out of the stream.

The members of the party were in the best of spirits; even Mrs. Wakefield seemed to have thrown off the depression and rallied to Rance's gay sallies, he having devoted himself to her

especial entertainment. Tex, who was a superb horseman, had picked up a magnificent half-breed animal, with enough mustang blood to give him the spirit and wildness characteristic of the Spanish-bred horse. It was a trial to Ruth's nerves when, Tex having mounted, the animal bucked and plunged madly to unseat him, but she was proud of his skill and horsemanship in soon subduing his steed to comparative tameness.

Rance had purchased from an immigrant party an animal bred in Missouri, a fine, clean-limbed, broad-chested, powerful bay, for which he had paid a goodly price. He had never regretted his investment, however, as it was an ideal saddle animal and under the care and kind treatment of its owner had become a companion pet to the dog Jack, and the pair were almost inseparable.

Riding was rather awkward for the ladies, as side saddles were unprocurable, but improvised pack saddles were made to do duty, and as the women were mounted on quiet animals they soon became accustomed to them.

A halt was made at the old Mexican roadside house, near which Rance had had his adventure with Joaquin Murieta's band, where they found the innkeeper desolate and alone. The prop and

stay of his inn were gone. *"Las muchachas fueron muy ingratas,"* his daughters had left him, formed misalliances, from his point of view, with hated *Americanos,* and the attraction of his wayside resort had vanished.

A ride up Kanaka Creek, which in '49 had been one of the most prolific in its gold-dust output, showed a sad change from the days when the banks were lined with log cabins and the pioneers with the rocker and "tom" made music in its bed. There was as much activity, as many workers, but of another race. The Chinaman was gleaning the old workings, and the creek had degenerated into "China diggings."

A halt was made at Alleghany Town for dinner, and then the party plunged into the canyon of the Middle Fork, a descent of three thousand feet from the crest to the river and an equal climb on the south side. The trail wound in and around the curves and bends of Bloody Run, a wide ravine that headed at the flat and had but recently received its gruesome christening. It was a toll trail; and the keeper, a jolly Irishman, after mulcting each of the party a dollar for the privilege of riding over it, told the story of its naming, a tale embracing both the tragic and

the comic. Some enterprising Moore's Flat capitalists had constructed it at the cost of several thousand dollars, as a communication between the Flat and Minnesota, a mining camp on the ridge north of the river; but it proved a poor investment, the travel being limited and unprofitable. In order to stimulate it, the owners hit upon a scheme of introducing a "hurdy house" at Moore's Flat, an institution that flourished and prospered in the early days. It was the forerunner of the dance-house of modern times. Buxom Dutch girls were brought up from San Francisco and furnished saltatory amusement for the miners, who bought the privilege of a dance with these tireless Terpsichoreans at four bits per waltz,—the price of two drinks at the bar. Females were scarce in the mines in those days, and the "hurdies" were well patronized by miners longing for companionship of the sex and willing to pay the price. It was noted that on Saturday nights and Sundays, the Minnesotans from the opposite ridge came over in force to Moore's Flat and almost monopolized the dancers. In order to equalize matters, the shrewd capitalists hit upon the scheme of alternating the burdy performances, one week at Moore's Flat

and the next at Minnesota. It worked to a charm, not only in accruing profit for the hurdy-houses, but also from the fact that the Moore's Flatters in goodly numbers invaded the rival camp when the hurdies made their pilgrimage over the river, and *vice versa.* Toll at a dollar a head, under the stimulus, changed the investment into a profitable one, and the public-spirited capitalists pulled out with a good profit. It followed that the toll-keeper's cash receipts amounted to a handsome sum — enough to tempt the cupidity of three highwaymen who undertook to rob our Irishman of the accumulated tolls. One Monday morning, before he had made his usual trip to the Flat with the Sunday's toll receipts, three robbers called him out and demanded the coin, levelling their six-shooters at his head to emphasize the request. The Irishman, a brave and pugnacious fellow, unarmed as he was, seized a pick handle that stood by the door and wielded it with deadly effect, by a miracle escaping the fusillade of bullets provoked by his unexpected action. It is an historical record that he killed all three of the thieves with his singular weapon and went into history as a genuine hero. From the incident the Flatters

dubbed the ravine "Bloody Run," and it bears the name to this day.

It was nightfall when the little party reached its destination, and its members met with a most hospitable welcome from the landlady of the hotel, from whom the town was named. Mike's friend Hanchett was also on hand to add his welcome, he having been forewarned of the expected visit.

The town was in marked contrast to their own quiet hamlet. The mines were rich and extensive, and some two thousand miners were busy along the mountain-side, burrowing like so many gophers in the old channel. One would judge by the first glance at the business section, comprised in one long street, that withal it was a thirsty population. The principal and only thoroughfare was as usual named Main Street, ninety-nine out of a hundred of the mining towns so dubbing the highway along which the stores, hotels, etc., were strung, displaying a poverty of invention in marked contrast to the picturesque nomenclature of the towns themselves. Cross streets were impossible, as the camp clung precariously to the steep mountain-side and the first impression was that it would

require but a slight momentum to send it all sliding down into the river. However, its location had not been chosen for the advantage it offered as a town site,— the yellow metal was there in seemingly inexhaustible quantities, and the town itself was but a secondary consideration. Given the hotel, the express office, and the merchandise stores as a centre, there stretched away on either side drinking and gambling saloons by the score, all thronged after nightfall and crowded by a motley multitude, seeking the only distraction offered, convivial libations to Bacchus or the more fascinating wooing of the Goddess of Chance, who spread her nets in many different guises, from the more aristocratic faro and monte games to the boisterous rondo and keno. If business was somewhat slack during the week-days there was an added impetus on Saturday nights and Sundays, when the miners knocked off work and plunged into rollicking participation in the pleasurable attractions. Usually they were a good-natured lot, and quarrels were infrequent except among the gambling fraternity themselves, but the peace and quiet was occasionally broken by some assertive and quarrelsome desperado, who in his cups sought, in the slang

of the day, to clean out a fandango house, or appease his fighting instinct by the sacrifice of a rival rough. These encounters were too frequent to produce more than a ripple of interest beyond the comment that some sport had "died with his boots on."

Sitting on the porch of the hotel, Rance was reminded of his adventure with the dog and his encounter with the "bad" element, and incidentally wondered what had become of Brant, whom, it will be recalled, he had met on that occasion. Hanchett, who insisted upon being the host of the party in his role of Mike's friend and the leading citizen, grew enthusiastic as to the future of the place and reminiscent over its history. It was amusing to listen to this beardless boy, just reaching the age of manhood, dilate upon the discovery, growth, and importance of the town, of which by right of his luck or enterprise he was the chief factor. Scarcely a year had passed since, abandoning a worked-out claim over on Kanaka Creek, he had started on a prospecting trip, stumbled on these rich deposits, and was now the recipient of an income of over a thousand dollars a day, with every indication that the Paradise claims, as he had named them,

would hold out indefinitely. These, however, were commonplaces and were matched by hundreds of equally fortunate finds along the old stream.

"The boys have decided upon having a week's holiday," he informed the listeners,—"horse races, foot races, jackass fights, a turkey shoot, etc.; and to round it off, a theatrical company will give nightly performances in the town hall. They have billed for production tragedy, comedy, and farce. 'The Favorite of the Foothills,' Sue Robinson, is the leading woman, and the miners all swear by her. She paid the boys a visit in their claims yesterday, and they taught her how to wash a pan of dirt. You can bet that they fixed it for her to get a good prospect and I reckon she had four or five ounces when she got through making her rounds. The joke of it is that she plays that little game in every camp that the troupe shows in, and they do say that she has more of an income from that source than from her salary. What difference does it make? They don't begrudge it and are willing to pay the price for the pleasure the visit gives them."

"Yes, but about racing," interjected Rance.

"To run a race there has to be a track, and where can you make one anywhere about here? There is not a level spot in sight of the place."

"Oh, we've got a track up on the ridge going to Snow Point. To be sure, there are a few humps in it, but it's straight away for a quarter of a mile and that's all that is needed," replied Hanchett. "Don't worry, the boys are thoroughbreds if the horses are not, and you will see good sport before the week is over."

"That is all right, we will all enjoy it; but the race horses, where do they come from?" queried Rance. "I never heard that Moore's Flat was noted for its fast stock."

"That is easy," Hanchett informed him. "We have got one horse here that is hard to beat, and he belongs to me. He's called 'Honest John Wagner,' and I bought him at Nevada City after he had fooled all the gamblers in that section. If you want to rile a Nevada sport, mention that horse to him and you can have a fight on your hands in a minute. As for our racing stock, we were a little puzzled at first; but I happened to remember old man Hennessy who keeps the stables at San Juan. No better judge of horse flesh in the State than that same

Hennessy, who quit the seat of a New York cab to try his fortune here and naturally fell into the livery business. Our roads are all trails, so his stock are saddle animals principally, and he has picked up from emigrants from Kentucky, Missouri, and other Western States a lot of horses of superior breed, pedigree, and endurance. We made a bargain with him to bring a dozen to the Flat and we would match them to suit ourselves, guaranteeing him a handsome percentage of the stakes and putting him on his honor not to reveal to any one his knowledge of their speed. He brought them up two or three days ago and there is n't a shoe-string gambler in the camp that has not tried to bribe him to give a line on their respective qualities; but he has scorned their dirty money. To all he has said, 'I will not spile sport. I may have me own opinion, but it 's to mesilf I 'll kape it until after the race is run'; and I believe the old fellow will stick to his word.

"Talking about these gamblers, did you hear how they were all cleaned out a couple of months ago at the county-seat? No? It happened this way. A rough old cattleman from the plains drove a bunch of steers into Nevada City, which he

disposed of to the local butchers for cash. He rode a good-looking mare, putting it up in the livery stable, and after the sale he proceeded to fill up on tanglefoot, becoming quite boastful as to the ability of his riding animal to beat anything on four legs in the county, and offering to wager a thousand dollars to back his opinion. Like all the foothill mining camps, Nevada City had a fast quarter horse, which had beaten the favorites of all the towns round about, and the sports believed it was invincible. To make the betting a certainty they hatched a little plot and proceeded to carry it into effect. The cattleman had kept up his drinking and boasting all the afternoon, and half a dozen gamblers were deputized to keep him in tow during the evening, while a dozen more arranged for a moonlight speed trial on the track a short distance from the camp. The stable-keeper, more than willing to turn a dishonest dollar, consented to the temporary abstraction of the stranger's mare and the local favorite was pitted against her. Two light-weight riders were provided, and the racers were pushed to their best. Two trials were had and in each one the home mare outfooted the stranger ten yards or more in the dash

for a quarter of a mile. That was sufficient; the stolen steed was restored to the stable, the information given to the local sports, and a match race made for one thousand dollars a side, to be run the next afternoon, the cattleman insisting that the express agent, a square man, should hold the stakes. Before all parties retired he had made side bets of several thousand more, bantered into it by the now confident gamblers. The next morning, apparently sober, he was the picture of dejection and tried to beg off on the ground of irresponsibility under the influence of whiskey. The sports, however, insisted that it was either run the race or forfeit the money. Finding them inexorable, he proceeded to drown his sorrow in filling up again, and was soon as maudlin, boastful, and ready to back his mare as the day previous. It was astonishing how much coin he was able to produce, the express agent answering his calls for money without demur; the consequence was that by noon he had put up thirty-two thousand dollars and bet the sports to a standstill. Then the boss gambler, a little nervous over the few thousands that he had placed on a sure thing, concluded he would interview the agent, especi-

ally as the cattleman seemed to recover his sobriety as soon as there were no more bets in sight. He learned that the agent knew the stranger, who was Andy Wheeler, the owner of a big Spanish grant in Napa Valley, who had thousands of cattle on the range, and was good for half a million anywhere. 'Besides,' he added, 'I 'm taking no chances; I hold certificates of deposit with my company for fifty thousand dollars; they are as good as the gold coin, and he can draw the full amount if he wants to.' This information soon spread, and the sports' eager efforts to secure easy money came to an end. In the meantime, half a dozen tough-looking *vaqueros,* who had driven in the bunch of cattle, had taken the boss's mare from the stable to their camp, and the population wended its way to the track. It was noted that a little darky who up to that time had not been in evidence was in the saddle exercising the racer; and that the *vaqueros,* each with a couple of big revolvers in belt, were acting as bodyguard to their employer. The situation had such a business look that it gave the gamblers the cold shivers. They could not help feeling that there was a screw loose somewhere; but where? They had given the horses a thorough

test, and if they were deceived they could not puzzle out the plot. To make a long story short, the race was run and the local mare was beaten fifteen yards in the quarter. They were a sore and disgusted lot of sports, but they had to take their medicine. They could not cry fraud, for there was nothing to indicate it. Their mood was ugly enough to pick a quarrel; but two could play at that game, and the stranger and his *vaqueros* were too formidable to be intimidated. There was nothing left but to pocket the losses and let it go at that. The morning stage for Sacramento carried a heavy treasure box, and the cattleman and his men returned to the plains congratulating themselves on a profitable trip. The boys learned afterwards that the mare was the well-known 'Missouri Jane,' the speediest quarter horse between the Missouri River and the Pacific Ocean, and that she had made the same sort of a *coup* a dozen times in as many towns, from Mariposa to Siskiyou. That is why you must be careful when you talk about racing down at the county-seat."

Rance had listened to this tale of the biter and the bitten and acknowledged that it was interesting, but he did not exactly see how it was done.

"What was the secret of the moonlight trial, Hanchett?"

"Simple enough," chuckled the *raconteur;* the mare was cross-shod when she was put in the stable."

"Cross-shod, what 's that?" queried Rance.

"The shoes on her off fore and near hind foot were two pounds heavier than their opposites. This threw her off her gait and she could not make time, no matter how hard she was pushed. Before the race, these shoes were taken off, racing plates substituted, and she was ready for action."

"Oh!" said Rance, bidding his companion good-night and returning to his room, musing on the gullibilty of mankind in general and the Nevada sports in particular.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RACES

THE week opened as a general holiday, the principal mines shutting down and the inhabitants of the neighboring camps — Orleans, Woolsey's, and Minnesota Flat — swelling the crowd. Even the river miners, who had been forced after a prosperous season to suspend operations by high water incidental to early storms, flocked to the centre of attraction, with the result of a gathering of four or five thousand men, all bent on a good time, — that is, a carnival of dissipation and prodigality.

Our party, who were comfortably domiciled at the hotel, rather enjoyed the change from the quiet life at The City of Six and prepared to participate to a mild degree in the excitement. Ruth was somewhat fearful that Tex would stray from under her wing, she being inclined at first to resent his sporting tendencies, and was surprised to discover that the chances were that the gray mare in this case was not to be the better

horse. He had a quiet way of passive resistance when she sought to curb his liberties, and he tolerated her idiosyncrasies as natural to the sex and a penalty of the marriage state, which all men who took upon themselves the matrimonial yoke had to encounter and make the best of; and so he listened placidly to her lectures, smiled at her alarms as to the possibilities of his moral downfall, and reckoned that one who had mingled in the mixed society of the Texas border and had not fallen by the wayside had the stamina to resist the temptations of the mining camps. In fact, with the resumption of his pipe he had inwardly declared his independence. Not but that he was loving and devoted, but he was manly and not made of the weak fibre that would permit the domination of his wife in any of the larger affairs of life.

"The little woman," he explained to Rance, as he strolled away with that worthy to the stable for a glimpse at the rival horses, "is that innocent that she has no sabey of the world, and I've got to humor her until she has had some experience. She's afraid I will fall into bad habits, and me casehardened at what I've seen and been through. I reckon before long

she will find I size up pretty well as husbands go, and let up on her foolishness."

Rance whistled and broke into a laugh over this new view of Ruth's character, but lapsed into seriousness again as Tex, who did not seem to take his hilarity in good part, resumed:

"Don't make any mistake, Rance; she is one of the best little women on earth, but she was nearly spoiled by that first husband of hers. He stuck around the house and tied himself to her apron strings until she was dead tired of seeing him, and he hadn't sense enough to get out of the way once in a while to give her a chance to stack up his virtues against his weaknesses. None of that for me. I want to be out of doors, riding the range, bossing the ranch, and looking after affairs in general; and that is why I am going to have a cattle ranch somewhere in the valley and a ranch house big enough to keep Ruth busy superintending it. That," added Tex, "will divert her mind from dwelling too much on 'biled shirts' and Sunday harness, and we will live in peace and contentment."

Rance could not fail to see the good sense and shrewdness of Tex's plans, and heartily commended him on his wisdom.

As for Ruth, she soon became accustomed to and rather liked the big fellow's assumption of authority. She was vexed at times when the use of her sharp tongue made no more impression on her husband than the wind whistling through a tree-top. He had a habit of failing to retort, listening to the flow of speech without comment.

"He was that aggravating," she confided to a sympathetic friend, "he took down his hat, filled his pipe, and walked away without a word, and left me to talk to the four walls. Then I began to think it was a shame to torment so good a husband, and was that anxious for him to come back. Gracious! What a fool a woman can make of herself over a man!"

And then Ruth made a confession that indicated the affection with which she regarded Tex.

"You know, I always despised the smell of smoke; it made me sick, and I wouldn't tolerate it around where I was. Now, I am that silly that I had rather have the odor of tobacco in the house than Cologne water; it seems when I sniff it as if he was somewhere close around. Oh! I know I am going to spoil him," she protested, "but I don't care; he's worth it." From which

it will be seen that the couple bade fair to enjoy a goodly share of conjugal happiness.

The change of scene apparently served as a tonic to Mrs. Wakefield's depressed spirits. She acted as chaperon for Rance and Dot or accepted the hospitality of Mrs. Hanchett, who as the wife of the leading citizen was the arbiter of fashion and society in the mountain town. Practical Wakefield devoted a large part of his time to the examination of the principal mines, picking up such knowledge of the improved methods as would be useful to him on his return to The City of Six, while Tex and Rance, in the intervals of absence from Ruth's and Dot's society, found in Hanchett a congenial spirit and became his aids and advisers in his role of master of ceremonies. There were two races billed for each afternoon, and Rance and Tex, endorsed as square men, were chosen as judges, alternating in this capacity with a couple of visitors from Chipp's Flat and Jericho, who bore like unsullied reputations.

The first day's contests went off with *éclat,* for although it was a plunge in the dark as far as the contestants were concerned, it gave every

one an equal chance to exercise horse judgment; and as it turned out, the animals being fairly well matched, the races were close and exciting. On the next day there was to be a change in the programme. In those days foot-racing had not fallen to the depths of trickery and bad faith which characterized it later. There were a number of fast ones in the State, and many were the arguments indulged in by their several supporters as to whether Swamp John, Bill Cozad, Soda Jack, or Cherokee Bob was entitled to the championship. They were the noted speedy goers of that era, with occasionally a dark entry who mysteriously appeared upon the scene and contested the honors and the liberal stakes that went with them.

Some two weeks previously Cherokee Bob had wandered into the Flat; and as he had beaten Swamp John in record time in a square race the previous year, the miners regarded him as at the head of the profession. A few days subsequent to his advent it was whispered about that the gamblers were prepared to produce an unknown and were willing to wager that he could lower Bob's flag. Bob was consulted, and declared that there was nothing in the State that

could head him; and on the strength of his assurances the match was made for two thousand dollars a side, to be run in ten days; and Bob went into active training. It leaked out later that his opponent was to be one Harry Vile, an importation from England, presumably a fast one, but just how fast was a problem. Bob's supporters again called him into consultation, and he declared that he knew all about the Englishman's previous performances and that he, Bob, was certain that he could beat the quasi-unknown five feet in a hundred yards. That was enough for the boys, and they called the gamblers' bets whenever offered. The latter demonstrated that they had great confidence in their representative by the amount of money that they were willing to wager on him; and, as a result, when the day for the race came around there was at least twenty thousand dollars pending on the outcome. Of this amount Hanchett, who was a thoroughbred in all directions, had furnished at least a quarter.

He was somewhat startled the evening before the event when aroused from his slumber by Rance, who came with a piece of interesting news. Rance, after the other members of the party had

retired, had withdrawn to a secluded corner of the hotel porch, indulging in pleasant meditations and the seductive influence of a good cigar, and had been an involuntary listener to the confidences of a Moore's Flat gambler and a visiting knight of the green cloth from Forest City, the former intent upon imparting to his professional friend what promised to be a profitable secret in connection with the coming foot-race.

"Get your money down on the Englishman; it's a cinch," he advised.

"What makes you think so?" asked the visitor. "Cherokee Bob is a hard man to beat; he has demonstrated what he can do, and it would take a wonder to head him."

"That has got nothing to do with it; the race is fixed. Bob gets five thousand dollars to stumble and fall just before he reaches the goal and Vile wins the money. These outsiders that are backing the Indian are easy, and it is a shame not to take their cash away from them. The job was put up in Sacramento; we are all in, and Hanchett and his crowd have no suspicion of how they are being played."

Rance let the fire die out of his cigar and kept quiet in the background until the two worthies

departed. He had no wagers on the race, nor any particular interest in the outcome, but he despised treachery; besides, he had taken a liking to his host and did not want to see him the victim of a lot of thieves. After a brief cogitation over the matter, he decided that it would be an honorable act to put his friend on his guard. Hanchett was somewhat surprised, although not very much perturbed.

"We will give the hounds a dose of their own medicine, thanks to you, now that their game is exposed"; and so the matter rested until the next morning.

Then, just before the contest was on, a deputation of his backers took Bob aside and held a brief but pointed interview with him. He was asked if he was still certain of his ability to win.

"I believe," he stammered, "that I can beat him."

"Didn't you swear to us," retorted Hanchett, "that you had him measured and was sure that you could outrun him?"

"Yes, but he may be faster than I gave him credit for," replied the Indian, who began to get a glimmer of the fact that he was in a tight box.

"All right, he may be," was Hanchett's grim

comment; "but if he is, it will be mighty bad for your health. Now listen. There will be a man stationed at every ten yards along the track from start to finish. Every mother's son of 'em knows how to handle a gun, and at whatever point you are behind, the shooting will begin. Just make up your mind that no low-down Cherokee can come into this camp and play us for suckers. You said you could win, and you will win, stumble or no stumble; if you don't, you will beat all records into hell, where you belong, you treacherous dog."

The Cherokee realized that the jig was up, and confessed that he and Vile were confederates and had been brought to the Flat for the express purpose of robbing the miners.

"If I don't lose," he pleaded, "the gamblers will kill me. What can I do?"

"My advice is," said Hanchett, "that you keep on running until you reach Snow Point."

"But my clothes,—they are all in town?"

"We will see that they are brought to you, we will give you your agreed percentage of the stakes, and then you had better get your worthless carcass out of the county as fast as your legs will carry you."

Needless to say that the Indian was never headed, or to add that he made excellent time up the ridge to Snow Point. The gamblers, goaded to fury by the failure of their plot, were for pursuing, bringing the Cherokee back, and hanging him; but here the miners interfered, and the losers were too cautious to precipitate a row with the victors. Crestfallen and chagrined they submitted to their losses with the best grace possible, and the incident closed.

The trick was subsequently played in other camps with better success, but with the ultimate result of foot-racing being regarded as less honorable than holding up stages or robbing sluices.

The occurrence, while crippling the gamblers' resources, had little effect on the week's sport. In fact, the miners, flush with the spoils, were more reckless than ever and backed their favorites with prodigal profusion; and there were enough minor incidents of a more or less exciting nature to keep the camp in a ferment. One of the most unique of these sprang from the rivalry between the dwellers of Jericho and Gomorrah, two lively hamlets on the slope. Each had picked its favorite horse and backed it to the limit. To lend novelty to the race, the jockeys were two well-

known ladies, about whose morals there was no suspicion,—they had none to be suspected of. They rejoiced in the sobriquets of "French Henrietta" and "Boston Ann," and were so named by a wide circle of acquaintances. These two rode an exciting contest amid the plaudits and encouragement of the novelty-seeking multitude. Henrietta created a temporary monetary stringency at Jericho by riding to victory the steed selected by the Gomorrahites, a victory somewhat chastened to the triumphant Frenchwoman by her coming off second-best in a hair-pulling match instituted by the disgruntled Ann as a vent to her anger over the result.

Minor gun plays were frequent, but none fatal. Red Andy welched on his bets and took to the brush, accelerated by a fusillade of bullets, but he escaped unscathed; which led Jim Brand to criticise severely the marksmanship of the crowd.

"These fellers could do more execution with a pick handle, and should not be allowed to use a Colt. It's a reflection on the community, for they are that keerless that they will hurt somebody yet; give them a year or two's practice."

Rance and Hanchett had become inseparable during the gala days, especially as Mrs. Hanchett

had taken Dot under her wing; and the spicy flavor of the races and the attending sporting enthusiasts lent an irresistible charm to the amusement. Lon was a good judge of horseflesh, picked the winners with prescience, and as Rance and the ladies followed his lead, it resulted in a quite substantial gain, as they found that their pocket money had increased in a very satisfactory way. Dot was a little shocked at the beginning, for this was her first experience in the unconventional atmosphere of a mining camp, and the license disturbed her idea of the proprieties. The City of Six had been an exception — preserved, as it was, from the influences that made for the new life elsewhere. But she was a sensible girl and perhaps a little flattered by the deference that was paid her; and as care was taken that she did not come in contact with the baser elements, she did not realize how far toleration went, or just how much of a mixture the conditions stood for. Ruth had had more experience and was rather critical in her condemnation of the "shameless hussies" who were so much in evidence; but even she enjoyed the excitement and change of scene, and found little fault with Tex in his active and eager participation in the sports.

Wakefield betrayed but little interest in the events which made the week a notable one in the Moore's Flat annals, but he formed the acquaintance of various foremen, shift bosses, and leading miners, and found much profit and instruction in getting posted on all the latest improvements and devices brought into play in drift mining. He had decided to devote himself with Mike to the calling; it appealed to him not only from the profit point of view, but also from the sense of power and independence that was a fascinating part of it. The fact that competition was eliminated, that one mine's prosperity did not infringe on or detract from another's, that there was a ready market for the product and no fluctuation in prices, that labor benefited equally with capital,—all this interested him, and he had no desire to abandon the field and go elsewhere. Now that his strange hallucination had fallen away from him, the mountains seemed to stand for sanity and peace; and as there was no stress or strain, The City of Six would be his abiding place as long as the golden shower continued to fall. When it ceased, it would be time to take up other problems.

CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. WAKEFIELD'S ELOPEMENT

THERE had been a change in Mrs. Wakefield's humor. While she had taken no active part in the week's festivities, not even as a looker-on, she had lost her querulousness and seemed to be fairly content. There had been some planning as to the future. They would depart for the city before the first snow, Tex and Ruth, Rance, Dot, and herself. It had been decided that Dot and Rance would be married at San Francisco, and it was understood that Mrs. Wakefield would accompany the happy pair on a visit to Rance's birthplace, returning in the spring. The plan was acquiesced in by Wakefield, who was persuaded that travel would go far to restore his wife to her normal state. Without attempting to analyze the cause, beyond attributing it to the strain on her nerves in enduring his recent aberrations, he felt that there had risen a bar between them. She was no longer the woman he had wedded in the old village and with whom he had led the simple life. There was coldness, discon-

tent, depression, which she had hardly striven to conceal; but he charged it all to a woman's whims and did not give it the consideration that a more suspicious or less practical man would have entertained. It would do her good to see a little of the world, and, as Ruth said, "she would get rid of some of her notions."

Rance wondered why he had not seen Brant during his stay. He knew that the fellow was at the Flat and was closing up his affairs with the avowed intent of quitting the country. It was not an involved business that necessitated any delay, as it merely meant taking down the capital employed in the backing of the sundry gambling games. Rance was rather pleased that the man avoided him, for he was still indignant over his treachery, and a meeting might have resulted in an encounter. However, he believed that Mike's admonitions had been effectual, and that if there had existed any undue intimacy it had been broken off.

The party was to leave Sunday morning for The City of Six and then hasten preparations for the journey to San Francisco. Saturday would be the great day of the week, as two unbeaten horses, each having won from all opponents, were

to measure heels, and they were so equally matched that the camp was divided as to their merits.

The day had furnished an exciting incident that was quite out of the programme. At that time the notorious Tom Bell and his gang were raiding the roads and trails of the section, robbing stages and holding up travellers, not hesitating to add violence and murder to their depredations. There was a reward of five thousand dollars offered for the capture of Bell, dead or alive, preferably dead, and various posses had tried their best to earn it, although without success. He was an audacious scoundrel, making many bold forays, and his operations had become a serious and intolerable tax on the mountain-dwellers. Indignation rose to fever point that afternoon when he with his followers invaded the outskirts of the race course, where the gamblers had set up a tent and were running various games, coolly covered the occupants with revolvers, gathered in the piles of coin, and rode off with the booty, amounting to several thousand dollars. As the raid was made during a race, there were but few in the tent and no resistance was offered. A hue and cry was raised, but be-

fore a posse could be organized for pursuit, the highwaymen were miles away and out of danger of capture. Naturally, the incident was discussed in all its bearings, and the authorities denounced for not having run down and exterminated the robbers during the months that they had terrorized the country; but it was forgotten that this task had been attempted and half a dozen good men had lost their lives, when the gang, brought to bay, outfought and defeated their pursuers.

The final race, which by process of elimination had brought together antagonists of fairly matched speed, was productive of the wildest excitement and the most reckless betting. The crowd backed its particular choice without limit, and thousands of dollars were wagered on the result. Hanchett, as the leading man of the camp, was a favorite stakeholder. After filling all other receptacles with the coin forced upon him in that capacity, he was compelled to use his hat, which was soon loaded to the brim with slugs (locally coined gold pieces valued at fifty dollars) and became a somewhat embarrassing impediment, not only by its weight but also from the fact that in the confusion Hanchett lost all track of betters and the amounts, and could only

trust to luck in the settlement. As it turned out, the race over, he paid off all demands made, and to his surprise found himself the possessor of a surplus of three hundred dollars, which remained unidentified and uncalled for.

Altogether, the Moore's Flatters and the visitors were content with their entertainment. The San Juan livery man was paid a percentage of three thousand dollars for furnishing the stock, besides disposing of the speediest of the animals at a handsome profit; the boys had a bushel of fun and a welcome relaxation from their toil; and as one of the philosophic put it, "if money circulated pretty freely, the winners and losers belonged to the local camps, and the coin stayed at home."

Our party, somewhat wearied with the high tension of the week's events, rather welcomed the close and were quite willing to exchange it for the repose and comparative sedateness of their own abiding place. It was understood that on the next morning the return journey should be made. Mike had come over on the last day, "just for a taste of the fun," as he put it, and joined his friends at supper that evening, to which, by the way, Hanchett and his good wife

had been invited. A special and abundant feast was provided by the landlady.

It was supposed that Mrs. Wakefield had passed the day at their cosy home, she having pleaded fatigue and a waning interest in the amusement as an excuse for non-attendance at the track. The guests arrived without her, and they were surprised when the landlady explained that she had returned to the hotel early in the afternoon, had been met by Phillips, and that the pair had departed on horseback in company, presumably for a ride down the ridge. As it was by this time quite dark, her absence seemed strange, and Rance and Mike, with their knowledge of the relationship suspected to have existed between the pair, intuitively jumped at a similar conclusion and saw in the situation a premeditated flight. Shocked beyond expression, they refrained from comment until by a common impulse they had withdrawn from the table and met outside. Mike exclaimed:

"There's not a doubt of it; they've gone off together and the divil 's to pay, sure. There will be an awful scandal unless we can manage to kape it quiet; but how can we explain our suspicions to the rist of them?"

"Explain nothing! There is but one thing to do — follow them, kill the d—d scoundrel, and bring her back with as little fuss as possible. My God! how can I tell Dot? Think of the disgrace of it to the poor innocent girl."

"What about the ould man?" speculated Mike. "Won't it make him looney again? Now, if it was me, I'd say, let her go, and a good riddance; but ye can niver tell how the other fellow will take it. Still, he ought to be killed, and I'll be glad to do it. They must have taken the trail down the Backbone Ridge to Nevada, or one down the Middle Fork striking for Marysville, and they have six hours the start. Let's call out Tex and Hanchett, confide the circumstances to them, and then follow."

Rance, in an agony of rage and apprehension, agreed, and it was done.

Tex was stupefied over the perfidy of the elopers, but as indignant and eager for revenge as his comrades. Hanchett, to whom it was all new, entered into the proposed pursuit heartily.

"Phillips is a heartless, cold-blooded scoundrel, and if we overtake him we won't waste any powder unless it is necessary. I will take along my *reata* and we will hang him like a dog to the

nearest tree. Saddle your horses, and we will be off at once."

"But what will we say to the women? We must make some excuse for our departure," said Rance.

"Tell them nothing," replied Mike, "that is, don't drag in the man's name until we have to. Say she went out a-riding on a little *pasear,* has probably got lost in the chaparral, and we will find her and bring her home very soon. Tex, you go in and give Mrs. Ruth the explanation and then join us as quick as you can."

"That is sensible," interjected Hanchett; "and to avoid the outside talk tell my wife to take the ladies up to my house and wait there until we get back or they hear from us."

The programme was carried out; but they had overlooked Wakefield, who at this juncture joined them. It was a critical moment, but Rance had the presence of mind to explain the situation on the "lost" theory, which, as the husband was still unsuspicious, he accepted without demur. He hastened to the stable to get his horse and join the "searching party" It was agreed on his departure that he should be kept in igno-

rance of the real facts until developments forced further explanation.

In a few minutes they were mounted and off on a blind trail, a puzzling problem as to where it would lead or what might be the outcome. Wakefield's presence complicated matters, as it forbade discussion of the real object of the expedition.

Rance and Mike pushed ahead out of hearing distance, and Mike suggested that they ride on until they reached the Mountain House, some ten miles down the ridge, and there they could learn whether the couple had passed during the day. If not, they were fleeing toward Marysville, and the pursuers could cut across the country and intercept them at that point. On reaching the inn it was learned that nothing had been seen of them; and as it was now midnight, they decided to remain until daylight. It was a dangerous ride, the night being dark and moonless, and Mike argued that the pair would be forced to halt on their way until morning, so nothing would be lost by the delay.

At sunrise they started again, taking the Bloody Run trail to the river; they had gone only

a couple of miles when they were met by a traveller, who gave them a bit of startling news.

"There is a dead man lying on the trail half a mile below here," he informed them. "Murdered, I reckon. I saw that he had been shot, and that was all. I thought it best to get out of that neighborhood as soon as possible. If you are going down that way, you will see the body on the left-hand side of the path. Must have been there all night, for it is as stiff as a poker."

It was a malodorous section, and Bloody Run had been the scene of many murders and robberies; neither Rance nor Mike had any partienlar interest in the news, beyond natural curiosity and sympathy for an unknown victim. The traveller left, promising to inform the people at the Mountain House, so that the authorities should be notified.

CHAPTER XXIV

FINDING THE LOST SHEEP

PUSHING on, Rance and Mike again took the lead, out of earshot of the others.

"We can't play up this lost theory much longer," said Mike. "Wakefield is already getting suspicious and asking why we are kaping to the trails, or making inquiries at the miners' cabins, and why we should go to the river instid of hunting around the ridge. I think it will be best to halt down below here and tell him the truth."

Rance gloomily agreed, and it was so decided; but the trail was steep, and they rode on until they could find a halting-place where they could dismount. They reined in their horses on a little bench a few hundred rods farther on, and here, as the remainder of the party joined them, they made a discovery that led them at once to revoke their decision. On the oak-covered knoll of not more than a couple of hundred feet in area, they found the murdered man, face downward, fingers clutched in the grass roots, hair matted and wet

with blood oozed from a bullet hole in his skull. To both there was something strangely familiar in the corpse, and the thought came simultaneously to the pursuers that their hunt had ended, and that so far as they were concerned their quarry had escaped their vengeance.

"By God! it's Brant Phillips," cried Rance, as they leaped from their saddles, and approached the lifeless figure. They turned the body over, gazing at the white, bloodless face and dilated eyes staring into the unknown. For a brief time silence fell upon them, each busy with his own thoughts. They would have meted out the same fate had they overtaken him, and yet in the presence of death there was a revulsion of sentiment at his tragic end, succeeded by a feeling of relief that his blood was not on their hands.

Tex spoke first.

"He's been robbed and murdered without doubt," his theory confirmed by the absence of any valuables or arms. A survey of the ground roundabout gave no evidence of a struggle; there were many hoof-prints, and the grass was beaten down, and that was all.

"He must have been shot from ambush, taken unawares," commented Hanchett, "for he was

quick on the trigger and as brave as they make 'em. He was riding his own animal, Selim, as good a saddle horse as there was on the ridge; and as he was leaving for good and must have had a lot of money with him, somebody got onto it and waylaid him on the trail. They have taken his horse and saddle bags, and are miles away by this time."

"But the woman, where is she?" excitedly queried Tex.

"What woman?" demanded Wakefield, upon whom it suddenly flashed that the woman referred to was his wife, who for some strange reason had been in company with the outcast gambler. "Why do you ask for a woman? What is it that you are concealing from me? Is it my wife that you mean? And is this why you have followed the trail instead of looking for her on the mountain?"

Rance came to the rescue, and placing his hand soothingly on Wakefield's shoulder, replied,

"Yes, old man, we think your wife was with him. They left the Flat together, but there is nothing particularly wrong about that. They were very friendly, and she probably rode out a ways on the trail with him to bid him good-bye.

It was imprudent, of course, but she never gave that a thought. The chances are that she left him on the ridge and has returned to town, and that is where you had better go without delay."

It was a rather lame hypothesis, although the best Rance could muster in the exigency of the moment, and it was far from convincing. Wakefield revolved in his mind many little incidents subsequent to his return to sanity,—her coldness, apparent alienation, distaste for her home and its surroundings; but in the whirl of his brain he took counsel with himself and betrayed no outward sign of the truth that was forcing itself on his consciousness.

"It may be as you say, Rance; anyway, whatever it is, she must be found," he answered. "God grant no harm has come to her."

The listeners were agreeably surprised at his calmness and relieved that the revelation had not upset him. They knew nothing of the turmoil that racked him, or the stubborn pride that concealed it. The imminent question was, what was to be done? It was decided that Tex, Mike, and Hanchett should return to the Mountain House, conveying Phillips's body with them.

"We will give the dog a decent burial, if noth-

ing else," said Hanchett; while Rance and Wakefield were to follow the trail to the river, in the hope of getting some clue to Mrs. Wakefield. Careful search was made of the vicinity for some sign of her presence at the tragedy; but none was found, and the party separated. Tex was to ride on to the Flat, comfort the women to the best of his ability, but under no circumstances to reveal the facts, or give any information that would start scandal's tongue. Hanchett and Mike would stay at the inn until Rance and Wakefield returned, or sent word of their success; and with this understanding the party separated.

"I see it all," said Wakefield. "Don't try to deceive me. Unhappy woman, the temptation was too great, and I am much to blame. I am grateful, if no harm has come to her, that she has only grazed the precipice and not fallen over. Think of the disgrace to Dot! You will tell her as little as possible, Rance, won't you?" and the sorely afflicted man looked appealingly at his comrade.

"I 'll tell her nothing, old man," replied Rance. "Why should she be made to suffer? That is, if we can find your wife and nothing more seri-

ous than we know of has happened to her. I have a presentiment that we will locate her down at one of the river camps. The chances are that she escaped and rode down the trail while the assassins were robbing their victim. Let us hurry on; and keep up your courage, Wakefield,—it will turn out all right," and he put spurs to his horse and loped away down the slope.

They had ridden in silence for a mile or more and had reached the plateau above the stream where the chaparral ceased and the mountain sloped off gently to the river, when Rance spied a woman crouched under a pine tree a hundred yards from the path, and silently motioning to Wakefield to follow, he was by her side in a moment.

One glance showed it was the one for whom they were searching. Wakefield sprang to her side as she arose and staggered toward him, and his stout arms supported her as she gave a sob and fell fainting on his breast. She was a pitiable sight, hollow-eyed and tear-stained, hands and face scratched and bleeding, hair fallen down, dress torn and disarranged; there was every evidence of some terrible experience which had come to her in her flight. A great pity welled up in

Wakefield's heart as she lay helpless and unconscious in his arms, and a boundless gratitude that she was alive.

A stream of water trickled down a little ravine close by; to this they carried her and bathed her face, and were rewarded by her return to consciousness. Slowly she gathered in her mind the experience of the hours since she had fled from the Flat, her compunctions and regrets, her resolution to return, and the dominance over her will by her companion; and as she realized that her husband had knowledge of her guilty escapade, the blood suffused her face and she shrank away from his embrace, remorseful and ashamed.

Rance thoughtfully retired out of earshot and there remained until Wakefield summoned him back and the wife had gathered sufficient composure to give a somewhat coherent account of the tragedy of which she had been a witness and a victim. Without dwelling on the circumstances that had made her a companion of Phillips on the trail, she related that they were riding together, and that when they reached the bench where his body was found, without warning a shot was fired from the bushes and he tumbled from the saddle without a cry. Horrified and

frightened beyond measure, she urged her horse down the trail, but was overtaken by two men, who ordered her to stop and led her back to the knoll. Here were three more, one holding the horses, among which was the victim's, and the other two rifling the dead man's clothes and exploring the saddle bags.

The leader, a blond giant whom she afterward learned was no other than the notorious Tom Bell, roughly inquired who she was and where she was going with her companion.

"Brant had no use for women," he commented; "you must have been a newcomer at the Flat. Damn him, I'm even with him; he had his shot at me over at San Juan when the posse struck my trail a year ago; he won't volunteer to hunt highwaymen any more. Say it was Tom Bell and his men, and that a gambler more or less don't matter."

She would have gladly departed; but the men, two villainous whites and a couple of Greasers, remonstrated.

"Better take her down to the river and turn her loose there. No use of getting them at our heels too soon."

"All right. Fling the carrion in the bushes

and come along," he ordered. They started down the trail, leading her horse by the bridle until they came to a canyon making out from the river. Into this they turned, an almost inaccessible retreat, and there they forcibly detained her until daylight, when they departed, leaving her to find her way out as best she could.

The horrors of that night can only be lightly touched upon. The miserable woman would have gladly welcomed death; but this was denied her, and she grew faint again as she recalled the experience of the past hours. After their departure she tottered and crawled to the spot where found. She remembered little more until she realized that she was in her husband's arms.

The recital over, Wakefield and Rance consulted on the best course to take; at all hazards the woman was to be shielded as much as possible. It was finally determined that Wakefield should cross the river with his wife, follow up Kanaka Creek to the Alleghany Ridge, and thence with all despatch to The City of Six, seeking the home refuge; Rance would return to the Mountain House, inform Mike, Tex, and Hanchett of the developments, swear secrecy among themselves as to the woman's part in the adven-

ture, get to the Flat quietly, and with Mrs. Ruth and Dot leave for their own camp without delay.

Fortunately, so far as known, no one was aware of Mrs. Wakefield's departure with Phillips, except the landlady, and it was believed that the facts could be kept secret. The murder of the gambler would not create much of a sensation; it was only another crime added to Tom Bell's record; and to those who knew the true state of affairs his removal was a timely and special providence.

Rance, on reaching the inn, said nothing as to Mrs. Wakefield's part beyond relating that she had fled when the shot was fired and escaped to the settlement on the river where they found her.

Hanchett took it upon himself to keep the matter as quiet as possible. The usual inquest was held over the gambler's remains, a verdict of "robbed and murdered by Tom Bell and gang" arrived at; and beyond current comment among his kind the incident closed, and Brant Phillips lay in his unhonored grave.

What transpired between Wakefield and his wife on that sad journey back to The City of Six did not come to light. The man never alluded

to it to Rance, or any one else, and whether he forgave or not remained a secret. The wretched woman was both mentally and physically a wreck, and for many days hovered between life and death. Dot took upon herself the duty of nurse, a task she most faithfully and lovingly performed. Mrs. Ruth gladly would have shared it with her, but both man and wife absolutely declined, and insisted that the misfortune should in no way interfere with the plans of Tex and Ruth. Rance fathomed this reluctance and advised his comrade to start out on his quest for the *hacienda* which he had coveted in his daydreams, promising that as soon as the patient had recovered sufficiently and the cattle ranch had become a reality, the party as originally intended would make their visit to the coast lands and accept the hospitality of their old comrade. If Mrs. Ruth did remark to her lord that "no good ever came of gallivanting around the country with scandalous characters" (forgetting that she had not only tolerated the gambler but had held him up to Tex's eyes as worthy of imitation), it was only because she felt annoyed that her volunteered assistance had been declined. Good soul, she was all charity, and gladly would have sacrificed her

own comfort if allowed. A week later, they left for San Francisco and regretfully turned away from the little camp that had seen the beginning and culmination of their romance.

Of course, her mother's illness necessarily interfered with Dot's marriage.

"I can't leave her, can I, Rance? And you will wait, won't you?" shyly but confidently she asked her lover. And the gallant swain, protesting that it was a hardship — that was not to be denied — agreed to bide the time patiently, provided that it should not be too prolonged a wait and that the patient did not monopolize all of her hours. So it came about that the porch had another occupant, and Rance's visit to his old home was postponed until the fates became more propitious.

Rather strangely, as both Mike and Rance thought, the happening seemed not to have affected Wakefield very deeply. A squaw who had taken kindly to Ruth's tuition and had absorbed a little civilization in the performance of household duties, was installed as Dot's assistant and performed the household drudgery, encouraged by wage and fare that made her the envy of her tribe; while Tong, the Chinaman, who was

now the recipient of that anticipated "one hundled dolla hap," to which he had aspired, took upon himself the preparation of various delicacies for the household, dishes the knowledge of which he had acquired in Ruth's service and which he faithfully and skilfully imitated.

"You sabe Missy Luth?" he inquired of his chief assistant. "No, you no belly much sabe Missy. She say, 'Tong, why you no Chlistian? You good man?' I say, 'What fo'? Spose no shave head, have clothes all same Tex, have one joss, what good? Melican man callee me damn Chinaman, allee same.' She say, 'Tong, you heathen,'—she talkee, talkee allee day. Chlistian woman too much talkee, but I no likee Missy go way. She belly good woman. Bimeby she catchee lanch, maybe I go too," and Tong shook his head sadly and went about his duties like one forlorn. He had become accustomed to Ruth's flow of language and he missed it; there was an oppressive silence, a lack of the spur, a stillness in the atmosphere as noticeable as the sudden stop of a mill, or the hush of a buzzing saw checked in its revolutions, and Tong rebelled at the unaccustomed quiet. Besides, he was grateful to her, for she had rescued him from

abuse and contumely. Under her protection no one had dared do him despite, and although he betrayed no outward emotion on her leaving and was as stolid and impassive as a stone image, his assistant was forced to listen to a long eulogy of her virtues, delivered in guttural Chinese; and privately Tong propitiated the heathen gods and burned punk and written prayers in supplication that she might be favored by all the calendar of heathen deities.

CHAPTER XXV

WAKEFIELD'S PURPOSE OF REVENGE

HIS comrades were in error as to Wakefield's supposed apathy. He had been deeply wounded by his wife's inconstancy and stirred to the depths by the tortures and indignities she had suffered. He granted a measure of palliation for the former as being himself the inciting, if innocent, cause; his strange mental affliction, he reasoned, being the root and foundation of her estrangement. If her feet had strayed into forbidden paths and her love waned, that might be pardoned, although there could never, he reasoned, come a renewal of the old ties,—in that direction he believed himself implacable. He had neither reproached nor pitied, but had agreed to shield her from the consequences of her mad act even to the point of concealing the truth from the daughter. In fact, he was more than anxious to compass the latter task. Dot in her innocence was persuaded that her mother, perhaps imprudently but with no wrong intent, had accompanied the gambler on an afternoon ride,

and that both would have returned before the night fell had not the tragedy intervened; and that the shock and horror of being an unwilling witness to the assassination had been too much of a nervous strain, resulting in prostrating her. There was but one thing to do,—nurse her back to health; then all would be well again. And there were compensations for Dot. The patient was kept under the influence of sedatives, and there were many precious minutes during the day when she could be left to slumber, minutes when, seeking the porch, Dot found the waiting Rance. Glorious hours they were, made happier by confident youth and trusting love planning life's pilgrimage together; a future serene and untroubled; a paradise into which the two would enter with no angel with flaming sword to bar the way. Happy daydreams they were, and Rance was careful to cast no doubting shadow on the roseate prospect.

Wakefield, who had taken up his abode in the office and begun in earnest sharing the supervision of the mine with Mike, visited the house daily to inquire as to the sick woman's condition, seemingly anxious to learn of her progress toward recovery; but his stay was brief and somewhat

perfunctory, although he was always pleased to hear of her improvement. At the end of a month she had regained sufficient strength to be pronounced out of danger; when satisfied of this he had a confidential talk with Rance, in which, much to the latter's surprise, he announced his determination to wreak revenge on the murderous gang responsible for her wrongs.

"I can never rest easy," he insisted, "so long as they cumber the earth. It is not a question of bringing them to justice; I am possessed with the desire to exterminate them—the thought of their living keeps me at fever heat. I have a lust for revenge, and until it is satisfied I cannot have a moment of content.

"No, Rance," he continued, in reply to his comrade's expostulations, "it may be a mania, but you need not fear for my reason. I have concluded that it is my duty to mete out to them the punishment which you will not dispute they deserve. Now that my wife has regained her health, or is in a fair way to do so, I can safely commit her to your and Dot's care, and leave you all for a time. If I don't come back, what difference? Perhaps it would be better. Rance,"—and Wakefield was fairly overcome by emo-

tion,—"I could not love you more if you were my own son; and what little happiness is left for me is the knowledge that Dot is to become your wife. You are sure that this thing has made no difference in your feelings toward her?" and he looked wistfully at Rance for confirmation of his hopes.

Rance indignantly repudiated the possibility of any change in the state of his affections and renewed his efforts to dissuade his partner from what he pronounced a mad project.

"What can you do single-handed against such a gang of murderous villains?" he pleaded. "Why not abandon them to the inevitable fate that will overtake them? They run their race, and in the end perish like dogs. Let us leave the mine to Mike—that will be no hardship to him, although he is delighted to think that you are coming back to share the responsibility of managing it, and we will indulge in a holiday. We are rich enough to afford it. Take your wife and go with Dot and me to the South. It will be well to leave The City of Six, for a time at least, and forget the incidents of the past month or two."

Wakefield shook his head negatively. "No,

Rance, it is impossible. Happily, Dot knows nothing of the truth, and why need she? Why bring this misery into her young life when she can be spared? Hurry up the marriage and take her away from here. Make your visit to your old home and leave me to my devices."

"Why include in your programme so perilous a mission as the extermination of Bell's gang?" questioned Rance "As between yourself and wife I have nothing to say. The dog of a gambler is dead, and my only regret is that I did not have the chance of killing him. That was Mike's and my errand when we started in pursuit. Why not let that end the tragedy?"

"I really don't know, Rance," replied Wakefield. "I have been in a mental hell for the past month, as you can well understand, and it has come to me that it would be a relief to hunt down the hounds,—a pursuit that will at least change the scene, a distraction, a recreation; anything that will divert my mind from its present state. If all goes well, I will in time get back here; if not, well, that will be the end of trouble."

Rance could only acquiesce. The situation was a delicate and complicated one, and he did

not see his own way out clearly. He sympathized to some extent with Wakefield in his resentment toward his wife; and yet for Dot's sake she must be considered. Besides, he was impatient and longed to hasten the time that would make Dot his own, and the woman was an obstacle. Would Dot consent to a separation from her mother? And if not, could he submit to her companionship? He pitied the stricken woman; her sin had been without excuse, her punishment swift; he had his own chivalric ideas of honor and faith, and perhaps like Wakefield he could not have easily forgiven. It was a problem that he would necessarily have to leave to the future for solution; and so, grasping his comrade's hand in a grip of affection, he ceased to argue and left it to the future to unravel the tangle.

CHAPTER XXVI

DOT'S MARRIAGE AND OTHER MATTERS

THE season had been a late one, and although it was the middle of December and there had come an occasional flurry of snow, the ground was still bare and the way to the valley lay unimpeded. At the mine operations continued on the same large scale and with as profitable results as at any time in its history; but Mike, talking confidentially with his two partners, said,

"I have me doubts if it will hould out for another sason. The channel is running along the base of the mountain instead of into it; and if it don't take a turn it will chop off at Hog Canyon, and there we will lose it. The rist of it has been cut away for half a mile and gone down into the river. No wonder the bed of the river below is richer than mud; the goold in those claims was a contribution from the ancient strame that run through our purty camp in the days before Ireland was known to the geographers.

"Ah, well," he philosophized, "a foine slice of it was left, enough to make us all comfortable, to say the laste. What is this I hear about your going away? Bad cess to you all, laving me a lonely man for the winter. I would n't mind it if Wakefield was to stay, for that would be one responsible person to kape me company; but what wid Tex getting married, taking away the cook, and getting the cattle fever, and Rance there of no account whativer, I am as ye might say, 'without resoorces.' I 'll be going for a change mesilf. I 'm feeling the necessity for a little laisure; it 's to the valley I 'll go and hunt me up a farm; and it 's pigs I 'll raise,—they 're more sociable than cattle; and in the manetime, until I am comfortably settled, it 's a new manager ye can have for the choosing."

Of course, Mike did not mean it, although he was disgruntled over the prospect of being left alone by his comrades; but his occupation was too congenial to be abandoned, and his remonstrance was more banter than earnestness.

Wakefield assured him that his absence would be a temporary one, Mike surmising that it was a visit to the city to be present at his daughter's marriage. He had no inkling of the real pur-

pose of the journey and the prospect of Wakefield's early return was reassuring.

"Rance, me bye," he continued, "I envy ye. Ye're taking away the sweetest flower in the mountains, although I'm not saying ye don't desarve her; and I'm thinking there'll be no finer couple anywhere. It's a favor that I do be asking. There will be a draft for a thousand dollars in your name at Adams & Company's Bank whin you rache the city, and ye're to buy the finest pair of stones ye can get for the money, rale diamonds, and big ones, for to hang in her little ears. Tell her they're Mike's prisint, and the blessing of Hiven be on both of yez."

He was not to be gainsaid, this tried and true comrade, to whose loyalty, skill, and devotion they were so much indebted for their prosperity. There was but little said in reply—men of their stamp seldom indulge in the visible emotions,—but there came to them a realization of the depth and enduring bond of that old tie of "partners," that affection founded on and cemented by comradeship through good and evil, closer than that of brothers, and of which there were so many notable examples in the good old days.

"And it's another warning I'll give ye. What with the example ye're setting me, I'm feeling a yearning for the married state mesilf. There's a purty widdy at Downieville, so I'm told, who is looking for the right sort of a man. It's a-coorting I'll go, and maybe it's a Mrs. Donovan that will greet ye when ye get back to The City of Six."

They smiled at Mike's joking, but he spoke with prophetic tongue, although its realization did not come for some years. At a world-famous mining camp, when as a millionaire he had attained his capitalistic ambition, he met the widow and married her; and in after years, when his name was on all lips as the foremost mining operator in the world, his wife queened it royally abroad. The name of Donovan soared to social heights that amazed and confounded the genial Irishman.

It was fully settled that Wakefield and his wife and daughter and Rance would depart without delay for San Francisco, where the marriage was to take place on their arrival, and future plans be determined upon.

Whatever had passed between Wakefield and his wife, it was evident to Rance that they had

arrived at a mutual understanding and that the agreement included a compact to keep from the daughter any knowledge of her mother's misfortunes. She was a high-spirited, conscientious girl, and it was felt that if she knew the true situation she would refuse to come to Rance with a smirched name, although not responsible for the blot. It would have been a difficult matter to have carried out the programme had the mother rebelled, but Mrs. Wakefield had evidently accepted the yoke and gave no sign of an unwillingness to bear it. Dot was at times puzzled over the attitude of her parents toward each other and confided her bewilderment to Rance.

"Why, they hardly speak," she said. "Father is as silent as when he was Shakespeare-mad, and she makes no attempt to arouse him. You don't think, dear, that he is losing his reason again, do you?"—her eyes filling with tears—"It don't seem as if I could bear that again."

Rance comforted her to the best of his ability, assuring her that there was no danger of a relapse, and that the mood would wear off in time when the recent tragic events were less fresh in their memories.

"And mother—you know she had planned to go with us on our wedding trip, and now she says that her health will not permit her. How can I leave them both?"

This latter determination was news to Rance, who, while pulling a long face, was not at all cast down over it.

"Don't let's worry, Dot, she may change her mind," he answered, although fervently hoping that she would not. "Don't I count for something? You will have me, and that may help you bear the separation."

Dot demurely admitted that it might, and she was too elated and possessed with her happiness to pay much attention to the strained parental relations so long as they were not too obvious. Rance dropped a warning word to Wakefield which brought about a surface change in his bearing, to the delight of his daughter and the relief of all concerned.

At San Francisco they were met by Tex and Ruth, who were lingering in that city, enjoying a delightful honeymoon after their own fashion, although Tex confessed to Rance that there was "a fly in the honey."

"Look at me, pard," he ruefully remarked. "Did you ever expect to see me like this?"

"Like what?" mirthfully asked Rance.

"Like a cross between a faro dealer and a Methodist preacher. I could stand the long-tailed coat and the tight boots, but this collar chokes me. I'm lacerated under the chin. I can't see where I put my feet; it's like check-reining a tender-mouthed mustang. Say, Rance, she bought me another pair of kid gloves and a plug hat, and I'm damned if she didn't persuade me to walk down Montgomery Street with them on," and Tex sighed over his accumulated miseries. "I've promised to stand it until after the wedding; but don't put it off, Rance; I sure can't bear it much longer. Here she comes now; don't you let on I've been complaining. I'll jump the corral and take to the plains as soon as the ceremony is over."

It was a cordial reunion. Ruth was delighted to have her friends with her again, and at once took Dot under her care. There were the gorgeous shops to be visited, a trousseau to be provided, fashions to be discussed; and the little body, herself transformed by her own happiness,

was like a ray of sunshine to the rest of the party.

In due time Dot and Rance were wedded, and the new chapter in their lives began.

During the week their plans crystallized into action. Mrs. Wakefield announced that her health would not permit her to accompany the happy pair on their wedding journey. Ruth, who knew nothing of the inner motives controlling the decision, but aware that the mother was averse to passing the winter in the mountains, coaxed her to remain with Tex and herself until the quest of the cattle ranch was successfully concluded. Wakefield announced his determination to return to the mine as soon as his daughter and her husband had sailed away, and Tex did not try to delay the breaking up of the party. He had heard of a Spanish grant in one of the near-by coast range valleys that could be bought; he saw freedom from clothes that needed brushing, and hats that compressed his head like a tourniquet, and was wild to escape from his sartorial thraldom.

There were tears at the parting, but there were smiles through the tears.

"Dear old Mike, tell him we will all be back

at 'Paradise' in the spring and thank him for those lovely diamonds."

Mike's commission had been carried out to the surprise and appreciation of Dot. Tex had added a nugget chain — ponderous, massive, and characteristic; the groom overwhelmed her with a fiery ruby,— a deep-colored flawless gem that flashed and burned in its diamond setting; Ruth and the mother had ransacked the stores for costly fabrics, and the father gave her a bank book that showed a deposit in her name of five thousand dollars, "just pin money," he said, as he drew her to his arms.

"Be good to Rance, dear," he counselled her, much to her wonderment — why should she be otherwise? As the steamer backed out into the rippling bay, a burden rolled off his mind, and it was with gratitude and thankfulness that at least Dot had escaped the troubles that clouded his own life. Perhaps there was a latent feeling of tenderness for the one he had chosen in his youth. She had sinned in intention at least, and he in his supposed implacable resentment had judged her harshly. In the future there might be expiation and forgiveness. The impulse was strong upon him then as she stood listless, watching

the steamer, that bore away her child, pass out of sight around the point, to take his wife in his arms. If the place had been more propitious he might have yielded; but the wharf, crowded with curious on-lookers, restrained him, and his heart hardened again.

There was a change, however, in their mutual attitude. That evening they came together in arranging for the future. Both Tex and his wife had joined in persuading her to pass the winter with them in their wanderings, and she had in her loneliness turned to Ruth for consolation. She was drawn to the bustling little woman, whose cheerfulness was a tonic, whose vagaries interested her, and Wakefield gave a ready consent, arranging at his bankers' for her independence financially, and giving thanks to Ruth for her kindly acts.

"Let it all rest until the spring," were his parting words when the interview was over. "Perhaps we can forget it by that time. If you went back with me to the old camp now you would only brood and pine. Have a good time with Tex and Ruth, and when the children return,—well, God only knows."

If he had noted the hungry look in her

eyes he might not have been so sure that the mountains did not invite her; but he was tenacious in his resolutions. He had, in his rage, got the notion into his head that justice demanded vengeance on the highwaymen and that it was he who should mete it out, and he could not put the resolve aside. So they parted with a little hope, a little faith, and a spark of the old affection that might in the future kindle into a renewed blaze.

CHAPTER XXVII

WAKEFIELD'S PREPARATIONS FOR VENGEANCE

FOR a born plodder who up to middle age had pursued the even tenor of an uneventful and humdrum existence, and who did not by heritage or inclination seem likely to step out of the beaten path, Wakefield had betrayed queer tendencies. There was a mental twist, inherited possibly from a forgotten ancestor, that disturbed the placid currents and created erratic impulses productive of actions out of the ordinary. While he was played upon by every wind that blew, an idea or mood would possess him; once it took hold, he held to it stubbornly, and however wild it might be, he never swerved until he had pursued it to the end. No one of his comrades fathomed the depth of the wound inflicted by his wife's faithlessness, or knew of the silent and seemingly impotent rage that had overwhelmed him the morning that he had found her stricken and forlorn on the bank of the river. He did not realize that it was not his but her wrongs that wrung his heart. It did

not dawn upon him that it was to avenge her and not himself that he had determined upon the extermination of the highwaymen, nor did it enter his mind that he was undertaking a task where the odds were heavily against him. No, the blood lust was on him; he would match cunning with cunning, his life against theirs, justice against guilt, and with no doubt of his success he started on the pursuit, convinced that "thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just."

It was with care that he selected his weapons — a double-barrel shotgun and a couple of Colt's revolvers — and with equal foresight purchased the best saddle horse that money could buy, a powerful, clean-limbed thoroughbred endowed with both speed and stamina.

Thus equipped, he took boat for Sacramento and thence to Marysville, at which latter city he expected to find a clue that would lead him to Bell's haunts. The sheriff of Yuba County had twice headed posses in pursuit of the robber, for whose head there was a standing reward of five thousand dollars, dead or alive, and been both times unsuccessful. Not discouraged, he was contemplating another and was awaiting certain promised information that he believed

would bring the third attempt to a successful conclusion. Wakefield learned that the band had for a month past been operating in the foothills of Nevada and Yuba Counties, and that subsequent to the killing of Phillips they had raided a store at Cherokee and held up the Nevada stage at Bear River Crossing, the latter exploit but a week previous.

With the exception of Joaquin Murieta, Bell was the most notorious of the highwaymen of the early days. Born in Missouri, he came across the plains in '51 and labored for a brief time in the mines near San Juan, Nevada County; but tiring of hard work, turned to gambling in a small way. He was not much of a success in his new occupation, and finding himself one day without resources he resolved to take to the road. Appropriating the best horse he could find, he started out on his new career. Riding down the Marysville road to the old Zinc House, a noted wayside tavern, he stopped for dinner, putting his horse in the barn. When at the conclusion of the meal he started to leave, the landlady asked him what he was doing with Nelson's animal. Nelson was a well-known sporting man of Marysville, and it was his mount that Bell

had appropriated. He claimed that he had bought it; but the landlady was sceptical, said that she knew Nelson would not part with the beast, and intimated that he would not be allowed to remove it from the corral until he could prove a better title than his mere word. Fearing immediate pursuit and seeing that the woman was backed up by her retainers, he compromised to to the effect that he would let the horse remain in the stable until such time as its ownership should be established to the satisfaction of the lady, he to remove the equipment and procure another mount.

Bell confronted a dilemma. A saddle, bridle, and blankets are most necessary articles when the steed goes with them, but to this man plodding along a dusty road on a hot summer day they were encumbrances. Consigning the sex to perdition for its propensity to meddle, Bell had about decided to cache the trappings until such time as he could annex another piece of horseflesh, when he spied a team trotting down the highway, and — irony of fate — the driver was the husband of the woman who had compelled his horseless tramp. A sharp command to halt, a brief parley, and the driver found him-

self unharnessing under duress the likeliest one of the pair, which proved to be an excellent animal. Without opposition on the part of the victim the horse was quickly saddled. Bell's revolver discouraged discussion; and, relieving the driver of a trifle of two hundred dollars, which it was his hard luck to have in his pocket, Tom rode away after requesting the plucked one to present his compliments to his wife, say to her that a fair exchange was no robbery, and that possibly in the future she might be less inclined to arbitrate property rights. This exploit was Bell's initiative as a knight of the road, and he soon by his daring and audacity became famous, or rather infamous.

Crossing over to French Corral, where Bell had mined before taking to the highway, Wakefield lingered around the vicinity for several days, incidentally striking up an acquaintance with Bell's old partner, and by dint of judicious and cautious inquiry he became satisfied that the rendezvous of the gang was somewhere in the vicinity. It had been whispered that when the hue and cry was on, the members of the band, close pressed by their pursuers, had scattered to avoid capture; that Bell's friend had provided a

temporary hiding-place for his old partner in an abandoned tunnel, where a sack of barley for the horse and a pair of blankets for the man made it a fairly secure retreat until the emergency passed. He also learned that several times, after a foray, the gang had been seen crossing the ford of the river to the northern bank, disappearing in the chamizal that covered the mountain-side. Piecing his information together, Wakefield was persuaded that in some one of the steep canyons that cut the flank of the slopes there was a camp to which the robbers retreated. Following out this idea, he left his horse at the little town and started out on a systematic search, beginning at the ford. Following the river bank for a mile along the beaten trail used by the miners, he at last found signs of hoof-prints turning off into the chaparral; these he followed around and through dense manzanita thickets to where they terminated in a secluded granite canyon about half-way up the mountain. There were a couple of acres of bare ground close by, and there horses had been tethered, as was proved by several old stakes driven into the ground and by the beaten-down earth round about. Descending into the canyon,

he discovered unmistakable signs of a camp, the blackened coals and ashes of an old fire, empty cans scattered about, and near a spring which trickled from the rocks, a frying pan and coffee-pot. Wakefield was certain that he had unearthed their retreat, although from appearances no one had been near the place for some time; but he reasoned that sooner or later they would return, and forming his plans on this belief, he decided to await their coming. Climbing up the steep wall of the canyon and crawling through the interlacing thorn bushes for a distance of a couple of hundred yards, he came up against a huge boulder, from the top of which he could overlook and see into the bed of the gorge and the robbers' camp. This was his vantage point, and here he determined to stay and keep his vigil until they appeared. He had first to provide himself with food and bedding, and concluded to return to San Juan, some five miles away, and lay in his supplies. Instead of retracing his footsteps, with infinite difficulty he forced his way through the tangled underbrush until he reached the top of the ridge and clear ground, marking his exit by stones and broken limbs of the bushes in order to find his way back.

At San Juan he outfitted as a prospector, buying a burro and loading it with provisions, blankets, and cooking utensils, so common an incident that no suspicion was excited of any ulterior intention. He consumed all the next day in getting the pack back to the selected spot, but with the aid of a hatchet which he had added to the outfit, he cut the way for a passage, unloaded the burro, and turned it loose to provide for itself. Much to his satisfaction, he found that by climbing a near-by pine he could bring the ford and a portion of the river trail in view,—a fortunate discovery, as by keeping fairly close watch he was enabled to build a small fire and do his cooking, using for the purpose oak limbs, which gave out little smoke, and the fire could be extinguished quickly if necessary.

These preliminaries concluded, he settled down quietly to watch and wait until the quarry should fall into his hands.

It was a long and weary wait, and by a man less obstinate would have been abandoned in its early stages. For two weeks he maintained his outlook, sleeping on the bare ground, cooking his lonely meals; his only companions were the blue jays that at first scolded and squawked

over his intrusion, a prowling coyote who sniffed at his camp fire and stole away with a piece of bacon, a pair of gray squirrels that nested and frolicked in the branches of a close-by pine tree, a timid hare, pursued by a red fox, which almost ran into his arms and stood quivering with fear, frozen into a statue by the sudden encounter. In the canyon below, the piping cock quail called to the covey, and a dove and its mate "coo-cooed" their sad note in the open beyond. The solitary hours passed slowly, and with only his own thoughts for company Wakefield's self-communings were not always to his own satisfaction. Fortune in the way of material things had come to him far beyond his anticipations. He had found the golden fleece, but it seemed as if he had paid a heavy price for it. His strange affliction, the estrangement from his wife, his mental sufferings since his recovery — were riches a compensation for these trials? And then it came to him that perhaps he was not mentally so well balanced after all. Why this thirst for bloody vengeance, this lying in ambush to wreak his hate on a gang of assassins who could be safely left to the law? Their kind always reached the end of the rope ultimately. And

then, granting that as judge and executioner he succeeded, *cui bono?* What would he have accomplished? And in what particular would he be better off? Why not abandon the chase, rid his mind of these follies, join Mike, and settle down to sober work?

His heart had grown tenderer toward his wife, and he had made many excuses of late for what at first he had looked on as an unpardonable offence, but which had softened until it seemed an error for which she had been already too severely punished. Here was the key to his conduct. He burned with a desire to exterminate the wretches who had injured his wife, and it was the latent love for her that spurred him on. This accomplished, he felt he could go to her and wipe out the past—his coldness, his sternness, the sting of the bitter words he had heaped upon her in the first outburst of his mortified self-conceit, and dropping the curtain on the twelve months' interlude of the drama, ring up a new and more satisfactory act.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WAKEFIELD EXTERMINATES THE GANG

WAKEFIELD did not let these thoughts swerve him from his purpose, and one day he was rewarded by a confirmation of the correctness of his deductions, the persuasion that if he tarried long enough Bell and his followers would seek the rendezvous. Many parties had crossed the ford and had continued on over the divide toward the North Fork, a prospector now and then turned down the river path; but this afternoon from his outlook in the pine tree he noted a cavalcade of horsemen who splashed hastily through the river, took the trail and loped down the bank toward the canyon. Quickly descending, he crept to the boulder and shortly heard the crackling in the thicket demonstrating that they were making their way through the chaparral. A lapse of a few minutes and the gang emerged into the open space, unsaddled the horses, staked them out by their long *reatas,* stripped the saddle bags from the saddles, and made for the old camp in the bed of the canyon.

No doubt entered Wakefield's mind of the identity of the robbers. There were the blonde Bell, the two other white men, and the couple of Greasers so often described by their victims, delivered into his hands, as he believed; but—one against five—it seemed as if the odds were against him. This did not trouble him, neither did any false notions of fair play. They were vermin and deserved death; that was his mission and he had no scruples in the matter. There was a price on their heads, dead or alive, and the former was the more expedient.

Creeping cautiously through the chamizal until he reached a foothold on a ledge of rock above them and some forty yards distant, he rose to his feet, levelled his shotgun, and blazed away at the nearest, one of the Mexicans, who fell dead, riddled with buckshot. The startled highwaymen, taken completely unawares and believing that they were ambushed by a posse, fled toward the spot where their horses were tethered. As they climbed the bank the second barrel laid low one of the whites, who fell forward on his face, convulsively grasped at the tufts of grass, relaxed, and rolled back dead into the canyon. Drawing a revolver, he sped a bullet after the re-

treating trio, keeping up a fusillade until they gained the top of the bank and ran with flying feet toward where their animals were staked. One, the remaining Mexican, was winged, fell, rose, fell again, and scrambled on hands and knees to the cover of the thicket, into which he crawled and disappeared from view.

Before Wakefield could descend from his point of vantage and reach the opposite bank, Bell and his comrade had wrenched the *reatas* from the stakes, mounted bareback, dashed off down the trail, and were soon safe from immediate pursuit. Thus ended the battle, if it could be so called. It was a surprise and a rout, and Wakefield's vengeance was partially gratified. A brief search, and he found that the Mexican who had been shot through the hip was helpless and in a fair way to bleed to death from the wound. With an indifference to his fate that was almost satanic, Wakefield disarmed the victim, struggled with the temptation to blow the fellow's head off, but not being quite equal to this cold-blooded finale, turned back to the camp and gathered together the plunder. From the weight of the saddle bags he was persuaded that they

"Drawing a revolver, he sped a bullet after the retreating tri

contained more or less gold; this proved true, an examination of the contents revealing coin and a large quantity of gold dust. Besides, there were a couple of bottles of whiskey, bread, cooked meat, ammunition, and other articles. It was evident that the robbers intended to camp in the canyon over night and then depart, and this was confirmed by the Mexican, who afterwards confessed that they had ended their fall campaign, had proceeded to the spot to divide the spoils, when they were to separate, make their way to the valley, and meet at Sacramento a week or two later; that is, all except Bell, who had a place of retreat unknown to his companions, where he proposed to tarry until inclination prompted him to renew his depredations.

Now came the question as to further action. Obviously, it was his duty to inform the authorities and deliver to them the spoils. His action needed no justification; on the contrary, he would receive the plaudits of the community for his daring exploit in ridding them of the scoundrels who had terrorized the foothills; yet he was not satisfied with the outcome The chief offender had for the time escaped; and this left his self-

imposed task unfinished and more difficult to accomplish, as the fellow would undoubtedly take alarm and flee the country.

However, there was no help for it, and he made preparations to leave. He threw the saddle blankets over the corpses, and propped the wounded Greaser against a tree, promising to send relief from the nearest camp, at the same time stanching the wound in a rude way. The man begged piteously not to be left alone, or at least defenceless, and Wakefield was persuaded to give him one of the revolvers, keeping a sharp watch to see that he took no treacherous advantage of the concession. Before doing this he had packed the saddle bags on one of the horses and saddled another for his own use, driving the third before him down to the river. He had decided to ride to Marysville — the county-seat and some twenty miles distant, — find the sheriff, tell his story, and deliver to the official the plunder. It was twilight by the time he had regained the river trail, dark before he had got well started on his journey; his progress was slow over the rough country until the plains were reached, and it was daylight before he arrived at his destination.

Rousing the sheriff from his early morning sleep, he told his tale, to which that official listened in open-mouthed wonder and an incredulity that was only dispelled by the evidence of the bulging saddle bags.

"So you were after the gang when you were pumping me here a while ago?" he inquired, which fact Wakefield acknowledged.

"Why were you so eager to run them down?" he continued. "Of course, there is the reward, five thousand for Bell and two thousand apiece for the others; but, man, there is that much in the saddle bags, and no one would have been the wiser if you had not turned it over to me. Now," he regretfully added, "it will have to be deposited with the courts and the public administrator, and I reckon there won't be much left after it is administered upon. You are a good one, to tackle that crowd alone! I'm no coward, but I don't believe I would have undertaken the job. You must have had some pretty strong motive. What was it?"

Wakefield flushed at the question, hesitated, but recognized in the bluff official a man in whom he could confide. Asking that as little notoriety be given as possible, he took the sheriff into his

confidence and briefly told him the facts of the killing of the gambler and the indignity inflicted on his wife, at the same time renouncing any interest in the blood money, or a share in the recaptured plunder.

The listener at once comprehended the motives that had urged him on in his unrelenting hunt.

"By God, you're a man after my own heart," he exclaimed, "and I'm proud to know you. There is nobody need know the inside of this but you and me. I'll send up a deputy to look after the wounded Greaser and fetch him here if he's alive. We will let the other carrion rot, after we have identified them. We may as well gather in the reward; if you don't want it, I'm not so squeamish as you are, and it will help get back some of the money that I have spent trying to run them down. But say, you're a white man, if I ever met one, and you have acted so square, I don't mind letting you into a secret. I would have had Bell in a few days anyhow. You say he rode off bareback. I think I can put my hands on him now; I know the hole he has run to for safety, and it's not many miles from here. I'll bet I get word in the next twenty-four hours."

It was Wakefield's turn to be astonished, and he asked for an explanation.

"Let's go over to the Magnolia and get a cocktail,—I haven't had a morning bracer,—then we will have breakfast, go back to the office, finish the business of turning over the money, and then you had better take a rest. Your nerves ought to be a little jarred after all this. I think by the time you have slept a few hours I may have some more news. I don't suppose you will mind to be in at the finish, and that means capturing Bell or killing him; I'm betting that he will die with his boots on."

Wakefield consented to take the needed rest, only exactly a promise that he should be a party to the final rounding up. He then followed the programme outlined by the sheriff, including the cocktail and the breakfast, and retired to the hotel and a room. A sound and peaceful sleep restored his nerves and drove away the fatigue incidental to his strenuous achievement.

It was late in the afternoon when he awoke and descended to the office, where he was at once the centre of a group of curious admirers who were anxious to meet the hero who, single-handed, had "busted" Tom Bell's gang. The notoriety

was distasteful, and he was glad when the sheriff came and invited him over to his office. When they had reached it and barred the door against intruders, that official exclaimed,

"It's turned out as I expected. We've got him holed, and unless there is a slip-up I'll have him in jail by noon to-morrow. I promised to tell you how it came about, and here goes. Of course, there's a woman in it,—there always is, for good or bad. This one is the landlady of the Ohio House and ranch down on the Feather River. Bell got stuck on her a couple of years ago, and she has harbored him ever since. He has given her the results of all his robberies, sent her two daughters to a seminary in San Francisco, provided for their education, and planned when he had got enough coin gathered in to make them independent, to leave the country with the family, go back to Missouri, and lead a respectable life. Nice programme, ain't it? But he won't go back. She has got the money, all right; the fool thinks she is as badly gone on him as he on her, and she's tired of him. So a month ago she gave me the tip, bargained for the reward—lovely sort of a woman, ain't she?—and agreed to deliver him up on his next visit. She

has hidden him many times and nobody suspected her. That accounts for our losing the trail so mysteriously when we thought we were close upon him; but you bet he is pretty near the end of his rope. As I thought, after you jumped him in the canyon and he got away, he made a straight break for the Ohio House and reached there last night. She sent in a messenger with the agreed word, and I will take a couple of deputies and go after him in the morning. I thought you might like to go along just to see the fun. You need n't take a hand unless you want to."

But Wakefield did want to. He had suffered no remorse for his recent action and was eager to carry his revenge to the bitter end; indeed, he chafed at the delay involved in the proposed wait until the next morning. But the sheriff was cool-headed and insisted that there was no risk in postponing the raid.

At the appointed time the sheriff, with Wakefield and three deputies, started for the place. It was agreed on the road that he and two of his men should enter by the front door, ascertain Bell's whereabouts, go to his room and demand his surrender, while Wakefield and the other

man would guard the rear of the house and cut off escape in that direction. This plan was adhered to; the woman pointed out the location, and the sheriff pounded on the door and demanded admission. No doubt Bell realized the trap that had been set for him; instead of opening the door he threw up the window and, a revolver in each hand, sprang out on the roof of the porch. Wakefield, who was posted underneath, recognized him as the man who had escaped him in the canyon, raised his pistol and fired simultaneously with Bell. Wakefield felt the breath knocked out of him and realized that he had been shot, but he recovered in time to see the robber, swaying and staggering, pitch forward and tumble off the roof to the ground. The ball from Wakefield's revolver had pierced his heart, and his career was ended. By a miracle Wakefield had escaped serious injury. The bullet had sped accurately, but striking the steel buckle of his belt, had been deflected, and piercing his skin, had inflicted a mere surface wound, a scratch that was of no consequence. The details of the pursuit and extermination of the gang was a nine days' wonder and then forgotten. Bell's paramour, execrated and despised by everybody cognizant

of her treachery, sold out the inn, collected her reward, and disappeared from the country. The Greaser who had been left in the canyon was brought to Marysville and recovered from his hurts, was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to a long term in State prison, which he did not serve out, being killed by one of the guards while participating in a convict break for liberty.

With Bell's death Wakefield's interest in the matter ended. He resolutely refused to accept a cent of the reward, or claim any portion of the money found in the saddle bags, conveying to the sheriff title to any interest he might have—with one exception: the horse he had ridden from the canyon, a magnificent thoroughbred that had been in Bell's possession, probably stolen, but whose owner never turned up to claim it. This animal Wakefield proposed to present to his friend Mike.

CHAPTER XXIX

REUNION OF MR. AND MRS. WAKEFIELD

LEAVING Marysville when everything was settled, there being no judicial notice taken of, or judicial inquiry made into, the killing of the robbers, Wakefield reclaimed his own horse that he had left at San Juan previous to his undertaking and turned his face toward The City of Six. He arrived after the New Year and was most heartily welcomed by his partner. The season had been an extraordinarily open one; there had been but a light fall of snow, and communication with the neighboring camps had not been cut off. He found Mike busy and fairly cheerful although a trifle lonesome. The good-hearted Irishman missed Rance and his cheery ways.

"We cud well afford to maintain one gintleman like him, and a gintleman he was from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet."

As for Tex, he mourned him as David mourned Jonathan.

"There was no foolishness about Tex; as

steady as a rock and as reliable. I cud go to bed and slape aisy whin he was in charge, and that's more than I've done since. I had a letter from him, or rather from Mrs. Ruth, which by the way will interest ye. They are down in the San Ramon Valley, where they are bargaining for a small farm of some six thousand acres—part of a Spanish grant, he says. They are stopping at Don Pedraza's *casa;* he's the owner. If they make the bargain, it's sixty thousand dollars they will pay for it with the cattle thrown in. It's miles and miles more the Don has, and he's disposing of this small piece for to have a trifle of spinding money. Your wife is wid them, but mighty anxious about yersilf; it's news she is wanting of ye, which I expect she has by this time, for the papers are full of yer exploits."

Wakefield winced a little at this; truth to tell, he was as anxious to hear from her as she from him. He had had plenty of time for a searching analysis of his feelings and found that he could pity and pardon. His heart yearned for his mate and he was willing to pave the way for a reunion, which he did that very night by the despatch of a long letter, in which he touched lightly on his recent adventures, indulged in no upbraiding,

and dwelt particularly on the daughter and her future: nothing must be allowed to cloud her happiness, not even a suspicion of an estrangement between the parents. With this peace offering made he relieved his mind of the sense of an injustice and opened the door for a better understanding.

Mike was not to be denied a full relation of his partner's adventures, which Wakefield rather modestly imparted, smiling at Mike's comment.

"It's not brave at all, it's just foolhardy ye were, and there was no call for it—hunting down thaves and robbers when it is better ye would be giving a helping hand to yer pard! Av coorse, barring the horse,—which is a foine baste and a valuable one, seeing it cost four min's lives for to procure it,—I see no merit in what ye've done, depriving the sheriff of all the glory and giving him all the money. It's a gardeen ye want, and I'm thinking I'll appoint mesilf to the place."

Wakefield took Mike's chaffing without offence and confessed that he was tired of adventures and quite willing to substitute himself in the place of Tex and make up for his defection.

"Now it's a streak of sinse ye have. The ould mine ain't a-going to last always, and it's the

dollars you will be wanting for the grandchildren. Besides, there is Rance a-travelling, which is expinsive, and he'll be nading some of the dividends, to say nothing of Tex, who when he gets his ranch will be buying blooded bulls and cows to improve his stock. As for mesilf, it's a miner I am and it's a miner I will be to the end of it, but I'll not go broke unless the bottom drops out of the worrld. I have me nest egg put away where it won't rust."

Mike fell into a reflective mood and held his peace for a time, while Wakefield gazed at the bright fire that sparkled in the fireplace, watched the flames leap up the chimney, and fell musing over all that had happened since they had climbed the trail and found their fortune in the old channel. Their few thousands had increased until they were comparatively rich men, and yet he felt that he had paid a heavy toll for it. At least, the strenuous part of it was over. Thenceforth he would plod along as of old and trust to Providence to set things right. As he looked out into the dusk after bidding his trusty partner good-night and saw the moon at its full rising over the eastern ridge, memory cast back to an evening when, standing at the door, he had seen

the crescent hanging in the west, and there had come to him the sense of the mystery of things, of something above and beyond his comprehension, a feeling that had stirred him to the depths and started him on the road to an unbalanced mind. Now it was not "Dido standing on the wild sea banks," or "Troilus sighing his heart to Cressid"; no, his thoughts went to a peaceful valley where, perhaps, a lonely woman "waft her love to come again to Carthage."

Through the winter, which was a mild one, the mine continued its uninterrupted yield, although both Mike and Wakefield knew that a few months more would see the end of it unless, which was unlikely, the channel turned on its course and ran into the mountain. Still, they had no reason to complain. From the beginning of operations in the Winter of '52 to the opening of Spring in '54, after paying all expenses each partner had over seventy thousand dollars to his credit, and with six months more before it was worked out there would be a further dividend of fifteen thousand dollars each. This sum judiciously invested would be enough to keep the wolf from the door. Then there was the chance of striking gold in the mine over at Hepsidam, the

property the partners had jointly bought from Phillips and on which they were vigorously driving the bedrock tunnel toward the supposed channel.

The responsibilities that Wakefield shared with Mike in the joint management acted as a sedative to his nerves, and the mountains as a tonic to his overwrought brain. He was no longer moody, erratic, or despondent, and it was not long before he began to plan for the future. And his plans were not selfish; they embraced the welfare of another as well. Wakefield's thoughts went back to his younger days, when he toiled on the farm, or worked in the village, and when his ambitions did not extend beyond the county horizon. He had won the belle of the town, had settled down to the narrow existence his environment made a necessity, and, as he looked back, had found contentment and a fair measure of happiness. She had been in all ways his helpmeet, and discord had not dwelt under their roof. It was only when he had gone out into the big world that calamity followed prosperity. Now he was lonely and longed for his old home life. Perhaps the longing was due to his now regular correspondence with his wife and the fact that both had fallen

into the habit of exchanging news and confidences, and it seemed as if each was seeking reconciliation and a reëstablishment of the old relations.

Letters from Dot were frequent and brimful of the joy of life. A severe critic might have objected to the fact that the greater portion of them was given over to eulogies of Rance, who from her point of view was a special creation, a man in whom she could discover no faults, and who, it seemed from her words, had no other mission than to make her happy.

"Niver mind her, she'll wake up from the drame one of these days," commented Mike after listening to several extracts exalting her husband, "and find him a man just like the rist of us. He's a lazy devil." Here Mike abandoned his cynical attitude. "Why should n't he be? "He's a capitalist the same as the rist of us, and he was n't born for worrk. I could n't like him better if he was me own. I wish he was back, for I long for a sight of him and his purty wife."

That event was not very far off. They had spent the winter at the old Mississippi home, were going to visit Washington and New York, return

to California, and in a month they would arrive at San Francisco.

Tex had been heard from by proxy. Ruth had written frequently, one particular epistle to Wakefield upbraiding him for his quixotic exploits in thief-catching, and another of advice and entreaty to visit them in their new home, of which his wife was a part. Tex had carried out his plans and bought his cattle ranch—a principality according to her description,—and was devoting himself to rounding up the stock, riding fiery mustangs over the country from morning till night, accompanied by a lot of "shiftless" Mexicans, who had transferred their allegiance and services to the new proprietor. She was sure he would be brought home some day with a broken neck or be trampled to death by the wild cattle that roamed over their possessions. As for herself, she was mistress of a household that nearly drove her to distraction—lazy, incompetent, trifling hussies, who rebelled at the Señora interesting herself in household cares and expected her to live a life of dignified ease and luxury. She confessed, this was not altogether distasteful; on the contrary, she found herself

yielding to the atmosphere of idleness and falling into the pleasant ways of Spanish habits and customs. Mrs. Wakefield was a permanent guest, and they had struck up a close friendship. The visitor was restored to perfect bodily health, but was at times somewhat depressed in spirits. However, the frequent letters from her husband were having an excellent effect.

Dot had written that she and Rance would return early in June, and Ruth proposed that the event should be celebrated by a reunion at the ranch of all the partners. They could do no less than greet the wanderers by their presence. Of course, Wakefield could not refuse, and this was especially meant for the benefit of Mr. Donovan, who, Ruth said, had not had a holiday since the mine was discovered.

"I 'm persuaded to go," intimated Mike, when the invitation was received. "It 's full of curiosity I am to see Tex wid the matrimonial yoke on his shoulders. In me opinion, 't was a lucky day for him whin the widdy made up her mind that 't was her duty to look after him. She is a woman of sinse and judgment, to say nothing of her capabilities as a cook. I can't consave of her lading an idle life, for she looked on it as a deadly sin. Maybe marriage has given her abso-

lution. I'll see the truth of it wid me own eyes. We'll take the risk of the foreman running things for a couple of weeks, if you're agreed, a make the trip."

Wakefield was agreed and more than pleased that Mike would accompany him. The return of Rance and Dot, both dear to him, would be a propitious time for a meeting with his wife, and softened by absence and chastened by his experiences, he was prepared to ask forgiveness, where in his wrath and resentment he had believed he could not extend it. So he was glad when the letter came announcing that the absent ones would sail from New York on a certain day and that the steamer would be due in another week.

The affairs at the mine were confided to the foreman, a competent and trustworthy miner, who had been with them almost from the beginning, and the two started for the coast. They were well mounted, Mike riding the Tom Bell horse which his partner had given him, and in four days they covered the distance, some one hundred and sixty miles, and rode up to the hacienda.

What a welcome they received! Mike was overwhelmed with the sincerity and heartiness of the greetings; and when Ruth, who had picked

up a smattering of Spanish, said, *"Esta casa es de V.,"* and Tex explained that it meant that the house was his, he felt that it was more than the stereotyped phrase of the hospitable Spaniard from whom it was borrowed; it was genuine, and the place was at his disposal. Wakefield wrung the big hand of Tex in a fraternal clasp, beamed upon Mrs. Ruth, and turned expectantly toward another, the magnet which had drawn him away from the mountains. She stood waiting for that look, which dwelt fondly and anxiously on her, and in it read the verdict that she had awaited. In another moment she was in his arms, and in the strong embrace she knew that the old affection and love were once more hers. It was reconciliation, forgiveness, and a bracing up of the bonds that had been loosened for a time. And then they withdrew to the house, where they could be alone with their restored happiness to reappear some time later, sedate perhaps, but beaming with joy and gladness.

Tex, among his old friends, was as happy as a schoolboy, and Ruth fluttered from one to another, with an occasional dash to the interior to superintend the bountiful feast she had had prepared for her guests.

CHAPTER XXX

HALCYON DAYS

THE bustle and excitement of the arrival being over, and the dust of the long ride being removed, they flung themselves into the big chairs, which invited relaxation, and grouped on the veranda of the mansion. Confronting them was a panorama of pastoral beauty. Enclosed between hills of a moderate altitude, the valley stretched away to the north, gradually widening out to a breadth of a mile or more and then as gradually narrowing to the outlet through the range. The rolling slopes, yellow in the June sun, were covered with a heavy growth of wild oats indigenous to the country. The hills and the valley were dotted with white and live oaks whose dark green foliage contrasted with the russet tints of the grasses. Through the centre a creek meandered, its course marked by sycamore, alder, and cottonwood trees which overshadowed still pools and rippling shallows and invited a retreat from the ardent sun. Under the oaks and along the stream a thousand cattle

gathered, formidable long-horned beasts, fat and sleek in the midst of never-failing feed, and over it all hung a soft haze, the tangible sign of the heated air—hot but not oppressive, that climatic condition that is the charm of the coast valleys of California.

"What do you think of it?" asked Tex, looking out over the prospect with a self-satisfied air. "The old Don called it 'Rancho de la Paz,' which means 'Peaceful Ranch,' and Ruth and I agreed that it could not be better named. There are about twenty thousand acres in the valley altogether, and I have bought nearly a third; by rights I ought to own it all, but that 's beyond my means at present. We will take a ride over it to-morrow when you are rested."

"To-morrow, is it?" retorted Mike. "Do you take me for leather? Sore and stiff I am wid me trip from The City of Six; four days in the saddle, and me not used to it. If you plaze, we will take no ride to-morrow, or the day after. I 'll walk it wid ye, but ride I 'll not unless ye substitute a pillow for a saddle."

"You'll think better of it in the morning," laughed Tex; "walking is unknown in this

country; even the cattle would resent it, and you would not be safe except you were mounted."

Mike's grumbling was stopped by the appearance of a black-haired, olive-colored *muchacha* who invited them to "*Vamos a comer,*" and the party adjourned to the dining-room, where a bountiful spread was waiting. Ruth's attempted apologies for certain deficiencies were scoffed at. There was that quaint flavor and strangeness to the dishes that appealed to their palates, and the newcomers agreed that it was a grateful change from the stereotyped boarding-house fare as furnished by the accomplished Tong. The crisp *tortillas;* the savory jerked beef *estofado* spiced with pimientos; the *enchiladas,* wrapped in corn husks; the mixture of *frijoles* and rice; the *dulces* and the native wine and fragrant coffee were a revelation to the guests, although Ruth sniffed and declared that her handmaids were heathen whom she hoped to train to better methods.

"To think of it," she exclaimed, "with hundreds of cows roaming about, not a pint of milk or a pound of butter on the place, not even a kitchen garden or a vegetable. They fry every-

thing in oil and never heard of a pie; and if you want fresh meat they just lasso a steer and kill it; not that there is any waste in that, for there is a lazy tribe infesting the ranch that would breed a famine, and they don't do enough work to pay for their keep."

At this Tex chuckled.

"Tell them about your maids," he said; and the little woman laughed as she named Celestina, Panchita, Juanita, and Anita. "Would you believe it," she said, "they think that for the Señora, as they call me, to lift her finger to help herself is degrading? No lady can comb her hair, put on her shoes, make up her own bed, or do anything else but sit around in a rocking-chair and see things go by sixes and sevens; and Tex says I must not fly in the face of the customs of the country, or they will suspect that we are *gente ordinaria.*"

"Yes, and that ain't the worst of it; she is getting so she likes it," retorted Tex. "This is a great place for siestas, which means that you just loaf around all day, except in the cool of the mornings and evenings."

Here Tex shoved back his chair from the table, pulled a little square of brown paper and some

tobacco from his pocket and proceeded to roll a cigarette, which, when done, he politely offered to Mike.

"And what will I do wid it?" asked Mike. "Smoke it, ye say? On me word, I'd get more satisfaction from a straw. Wid the ladies' permission, I'll have an honest whiff from the ould pipe. Them things are but an aggravation."

Tex, a little abashed, apologized and explained that it was another custom to smoke the despised article between courses and then adjourn to the veranda for a satisfying cigar, which Mrs. Ruth thought was more aristocratic than the pipe, and so he had discarded it. Sending the boy for a box of perfectos, they returned once more to the broad piazza, where the evening was given up to the news from The City of Six, Tex's investments, and a hinting of some tentative plans that he had to submit to his partners.

The steamer was due in a couple of days, and it was agreed that Wakefield, Mike, and Tex should proceed to the city to meet Rance and Dot and bring them at once to the rancho. An ancient *calesa* was resurrected, much to Mike's gratification, who did not feel equal to another day on horseback; a pair of half-broken mustangs

were hitched to it, and with Tex on horseback the party made their way to Oakland, where the outfit was left before crossing the Bay.

The steamer arrived at the appointed time, and the expected ones were aboard. Rance and Dot met a warm and loving welcome. Rance was delighted to be once more with his old friends, and when he had taken Mike aside and learned that Wakefield was in possession of his normal faculties and that all was well with the rest of them, he declared that his cup of happiness was overflowing.

"And Mrs. Poole," interposed Mike, "may I inquire as to her hilth? I'd do it personally, but nobody has a chance wid her father monopolizing her. She do be looking foine. The divil you say!" he ejaculated. "It's rist and quiet she wants, does she? Well, plenty of it she'll have at the Rancho de la Paz." This in reply to a whispered communication from the proud husband. "That is the name of Tex's new farm, and so far as I can see there is nothing else than rist and quiet there. You may not belave it, but Mrs. Ruth hersilf is doing a bit of that same, and there will be a pair of thim. Bless me soul, I must be getting married mesilf; it's contagious

it's getting, although—" (here Dot clasped his hand). "Sure I look on ye both as me children, and it's glad we are to have ye back wid us once more." There were a thousand questions to ask and to be answered; and, as Mike softly whispered, "Thank the good God, there are none of them that we cannot give a straight answer to."

The next day they started for the ranch, where there was another joyful reunion. It needed only this meeting of mother and daughter and the perfect understanding that renewed their mutual affection to bring to each one of the party complete contentment. There were phases of the tragical incidents known only to Rance and Wakefield, and the former soon learned that Wakefield had taken his wife to his bosom once more. This *dénouement* made the situation an easy one to meet, as no explanations were demanded or necessary.

It was a happy group that gathered on the veranda that evening. Rance was called upon to tell of their travels, and Dot described Rance's visit to his boyhood home and her days on the old plantation, where she was made much of, notwithstanding that she was from the North; of the entreaties to stay, and of her own and her

husband's desire to return to the "enchanted land," as they termed the foothills. Tex told of his bargaining for the hacienda and Ruth's surrender to the effeminate customs; and then Mike, after vainly entreating Wakefield to tell the story, related that hero's exploits in pursuit of the highwaymen, every incident of which he had gradually and persistently wormed out of Wakefield. For the first time the wife listened to the details of his vengeance, understood that he meant it as the vindication of his honor and hers, and shuddering at the danger, yet rejoicing over her knight errant, her hand stole into his, and with the fond pressure, it seemed to her as if peace and love were hers.

Rance listened open-eyed to Mike's graphic relation. To him it was chivalrous retribution; it was more, it was the curtain falling on the past and the beginning of a new life for the sorely afflicted man.

The ensuing fortnight were halcyon days for them all. It had dawned upon Ruth that there was such a thing as misdirected energy in the world, and she had become infected with the atmosphere of idleness that was a heritage of the

valley. There was a good reason why she should relax her rigid ideas as to the imperative necessity of constant expenditure of vital force, a reason that impelled Tex to exercise his marital authority and insist upon a complete abnegation of household cares; and Ruth, who had passed her life waiting on and caring for others, found it pleasant to give herself up to the care and attention of the Mexican handmaids, although she was conscience-smitten at times over her own shiftlessness. Both the mother and Dot were soon under the same influence; and the trio, who had so much in common, passed many idle hours on the broad piazza, while their husbands roamed the valley or visited the neighboring ranges.

As for the partners, they loafed over the country, enjoying a *pasear* among the cattle, a ride to Don Pedraza's adjoining broad acres (Mike had become hardened to the saddle), and a midday siesta under a branching tree by the side of a deep pool, where a substantial luncheon, despatched by the provident mistress in care of a swarthy *paisano,* had full justice done it. Then they grew meditative and reminiscent, traversing their trials and experiences and under the in-

fluence of the after-luncheon pipe or cigar, concluded that, after all, luck had been with them and they had much to be thankful for.

It was at one of these noon-day halts that Mike, who had been doing some deep thinking on the subject, turned to Tex and said,

"It's a pity ye only have a paltry six thousand acres of this valley. Look at it, it was niver meant to be divided up, and I wonder at the old Don letting go any part of it. Why didn't ye buy it all while ye were about it?"

"A very good reason," answered Tex; "I did not have enough money."

"Would he have sold it all to ye if ye had?" inquired Mike.

"I think he would," said Tex; "he has another four times as big over in the Santa Clara Valley, besides three square leagues on the San Joaquin."

"And who lived in that lower house beyant, before he sold his own castle to you?" continued Mike.

"His *mayordomo,* who looked after all of the land in this valley," replied Tex.

"Byes, listen to me," exclaimed Mike. "I'm not saying that this country is equal to the mountains—even ould Ireland can't bate thim,

although I'm a traitor for hinting it;—but if the time comes whin there is no more goold there, this would be an illigant retrate, a place to take life aisy if we were so minded. Let's buy out the ould Don. Tex ought to have all the land that's nixt to him without limitations."

Now both Wakefield and Rance had pondered on just such an acquisition. Tex had convinced them that he had made an excellent investment, and if they could among them monopolize the valley and hill ranges, it would be without much doubt a remunerative purchase. Then there were sentimental reasons. It continued the association and knit their future fortunes in a common web. The life appealed to Rance, a country gentleman, lording it over his own broad domain with the busy world in near proximity. With Wakefield it was returning to the soil and a rest for himself and wife, with his loved ones close by; and Tex, of course, was delighted with the prospect.

The next day a business interview was held with Don Pedraza, whom they found willing to part with the grant, at his price. There were about sixteen thousand acres besides Tex's ranch, and four thousand head of cattle and a band of

mustangs,—a herd of a couple of hundred head. The Don was not a hard bargainer, cash appealed to him, and the price, one hundred and twenty thousand dollars, was fixed and accepted. A trip to San Francisco, a couple of days later, an interview with the lawyers, and the Rancho de la Paz passed into the possession of the quartette. It was agreed that Tex should assume the management with Rance as aid, and that Wakefield should divide his time between The City of Six and the valley.

The wives up to this time had had no inkling of what was going on, and it was a great surprise when, the night before Mike's return journey to his beloved foothills, the news was imparted to them. Needless to say that, after a little protest from Ruth at not being taken into confidence, they were more than content with the community interests in view. It was a principality in itself, and nature had so contrived it that it was practically isolated from the rest of the world and safe from intrusion.

In the new role of landed proprietors, the group on the veranda that night felt their added importance as citizens of the new commonwealth, and, in becoming attached to the soil, understood

that hostages were being given to fortune. Mike, in his newborn dignity, discussed the future in its bearings on their acquisition.

"It's blooded stock we want," he suggested, "and we must improve the breed. Those cattle run mostly now to horns and legs; it's a little more body they want."

Rance intimated that an Irish bull might do.

"None of your joking," he retorted, "it's serious questions we are debating. We will fince the land to kape our bastes from straying. Hivins, that manes sivin or eight miles of boards! It's a tract of timber land ye'll want to buy nixt. I persave I must get back to the mine to provide for the many contingencies. Sure, it's mighty good to look out over the land and think you have rights to it that none can deny. Do ye mind, byes, after we had struck it up on the mountain, the day Rance climbed the Slug Canyon trail—sick and sore he was wid a bullet just taken out of his lungs,—how we met that night in the cabin for to christen the place wid an appropriate name? It was the ould man over there who hit the nail on the head wid 'The City of Six'! Many have come, and many have gone; we are siven now instead of six, and a prospect for more in

good time. There was no better place, and sorry I 'll be whin the time comes to lave it; but," waving his hand toward the moon-bathed hills and the shadows athwart the vale, "ye can't deny we 've all arrived at Peaceful Valley."

THE END

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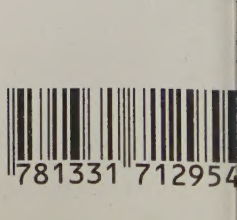

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